The Works of Ivan Bilibin and the Creation of a Russian "Third Space": The Exploration of Cultural Identity through Illustration

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 – Spontaneity and the manifestation of authentic nationalism of Ivan Bilibin

Ivan Iakovlevich Bilibin was born on August 4th, 1876 in Tarkhovka, a suburb of St. Petersburg. His father, Iakov Ivanovich Bilibin, was assistant chief physician at the St. Petersburg naval hospital. Although his family was not engaged in the arts, Bilibin recalled that he had "always drawn" and sketched every day after school as a young child.[1] In his late teenage years, Bilibin attended the School of the Society for Advancement of the Arts to improve his artistic technique while also attending a Gymnasium in St. Petersburg for daily schooling. Following his graduation from Gymnasium, in 1896 the Bilibin enrolled in the University of St. Petersburg to study law. However, he withdrew before completing his studies, traveling instead to Munich to train under the Slovene painter, Anton Ažbe, who had also taken other Russian artists, such as Wassily Kandinsky, into his tutelage. After a few weeks with Ažbe, Bilibin toured western Europe, spending time in Switzerland and Italy, before returning to St. Petersburg in the fall to study at the art school of Princess Maria Tenisheva, his future sponsor.[2] It was during his time in Munich and other cosmopolitan centers in the West that he was first exposed to the artistic culture and latest movements in European art. Among these, the *Art Nouveau*

[1] From his obituary "In Memory of Repin" written for the Russian journal *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Journal)*. See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 181. A biographical timeline on the life of Ivan Yakovlevich Bilibin is provided for more information.

[2] [2] As it will be expanded upon further into the thesis, Princess Maria Tenisheva was not only a dedicated patron to Bilibin and the rest of the *World of Art* publications, but was also deply involved in the efforts toward the revival of folk art. Her patronage resulted in the foundation of the Talashkino arts ad crafts workshops and artists' colony (located in the Smolensk region). See details in Hanna Chuchvaha, chapter 2 "*World of Art* and the Origins of the Print Revival in Late Imperial Russia" in *Art Periodical Culture in late Imperial Russia (1898- 1917): Print Modernism in Transition* (Boston and Leiden: Brill) 2016. 64.

movement and the Asian influences that inspired it, made a particularly strong impact on the young Bilibin. *Jugendstil* ("Youth Style"), a German adaptation of the *Art Nouveau* mode was also highly inspirational; Bilibin admitted that he had been "infected" with a mania for these new styles, characterized by their lavish ornamentation and sinuous lines.[3]

This exposure to contemporary artistic movements in France, Belgium, and Germany, was instrumental in Bilibin's aesthetic development. Exhibitions in these countries at the end of the nineteenth century provided vibrant and influential models of new techniques and media.[4] Bilibin also encountered examples of historic works by masters such as Albrecht Dürer, whose woodblock techniques would later be echoed in Bilibin's fascination with the history and traditions of Russian *lubok* printing..

On his return to St. Petersburg, Bilibin enrolled in Princess Tenisheva's art school, which was headed at the time by the renowned painter Ilya Repin. Bilibin remained at the school until 1900, when he left to audit Repin's studio at the Academy of Arts. Although Repin himself was a realist painter, he nonetheless helped inspire Bilibin's decision to reimagine Russian fairytales and folklore as visual narratives. Repin's 1876 painting, *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom* (Fig.1.1) depicts a pivotal scene from this *bylina* (Slavic oral epic), in which the protagonist is tempted by a procession of maidens presented by the Tsar of the Sea. In 1903, Bilibin followed his mentor's steps with his own highly stylized rendition of a different scene from the same *bylina* (Fig. 1.2).

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[3] See John E. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art Group"*, 1979. 235.
[4] See Boris M. Nosik, *S Nevskogo na Monparnas: Russkie xudozhniki za rubezhom*, 2010. 139-141.

In early 1899, during Bilibin's studies with Repin, Bilibin also became familiar with the work of the Russian painter Victor Vasnetsov at an exhibition at the Academy of Arts. Vasnetsov who was celebrated for his realist constructions of mythological subjects, particularly scenes and motifs from Russian fairytales, appears to have had an even stronger influence on Bilibin's thematic development than Repin. The same year that he encountered Vasnetsov's paintings, such as *A Knight at the Crossroads* (1878) (Fig. 1.3) and *Bogatyrs* (1881), which depict ancient legends from Kievan Rus, Bilibin published his first collection of illustrated fairytales, including "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" (1899).

Figure 1.1. Ilya Repin, *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom*, 1876. Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=23519489. Public Domain.

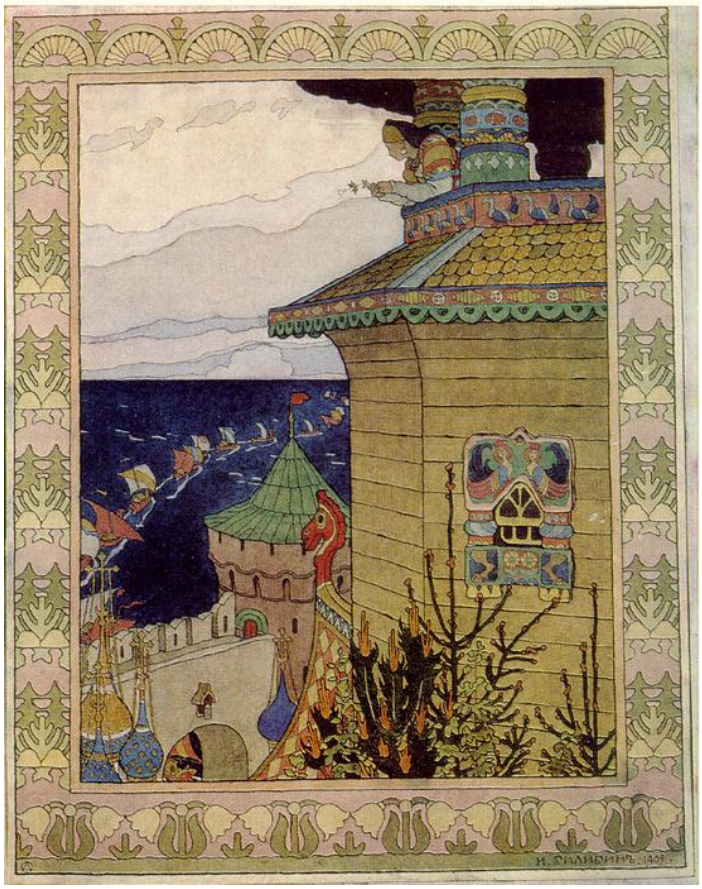

Figure 1.2. Ivan Bilibin, Princess looking out of the prison tower in “Sadko”. 1903. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=459182. Public Domain.

Figure 1.3. Viktor Mikhailovich Vasnetsov. *A Knight at the Crossroad.* 1878. Retrieved from wAFehP4o2JFtMA at Google Cultural Institute, highest available resolution, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21853937

In early 1900, at the end of his apprenticeship with Repin, Bilibin joined the *Mir iskusstva* ("world of art") artistic movement and its associated publication of the same name. He had been introduced to the influential magazine the previous year by fellow artist Léon Bakst. *Mir iskusstva*, which Bilibin referred to as a "window on Europe", allowed him and his fellow *miriskusniki* to monitor, draw inspiration from, and reinterpret the latest artistic trends from the West.[5] But the contemporary and innovative were not the only preoccupations of the *Mir iskusstva* circle. Bilibin introduced his colleagues at the magazine to the world of Russian folk arts, specifically that of peasant communities of northern Russia. In his ethnographic expeditions to the Far North in the early 1900s to study and collect artifacts of Russian folk crafts and culture, Bilibin did not seek simply to recreate these rustic arts, as some of his associates had attempted. Rather, he wished to achieve an authentic nationalism which could be realized only through an "intuitive and unconscious love of the finest spiritual manifestations of a nation"[6], not mere synthetic mimicry. This sentiment is visible in his graphic arts which are so unlike his Neo-Nationalist contemporaries, such as Vasnetsov, who rendered reproductions of the "Old Russia," but failed to capture the essence of the Russian style. Here, I contend that Bilibin succeeded in crafting a new Russian aesthetic that reflected both the old *and* new Russian identity and nationalism.[7]

During his time as a member of the *Mir iskusstva* movement and publication, Bilibin both contributed to the conceptualization of a new Russian artistic style by authoring learned articles such as "Popular Art of the Russian North," (*Mir iskusstva*, 11; 1904), and published some of his

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[5] See John E. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art Group"*, 1979. 235.

[6] [6] See John E. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art Group"*, 1979. 236.

[7] Bilibin's goals in creating an authentic Russian look through his illustrations is reflected in the goals of *The World of Art* as well, who rather than to reject the Russian artistic heritage, looked to form a "distinctive and great Russian art". See Stuart R. Grover "The World of Art Movement in Russia", 1973. 32.

most recognizable works of modern fairytale illustrations, which I analyze in detail in later chapters.[8]

In this thesis, I argue that Ivan Bilibin created an artistic, cultural, and political "third sphere" in his *Belle Époque* illustrations of fairytales and folk stories, situating his work, and Russian sensibility. This intermediary sphere situates Russia astride the traditional East–West sociocultural dichotomy in ways that both set it apart and allow it to draw inspiration from its neighbors to either side. Through a close reading of illustrations depicting scenes from the folkloric tales "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf", "Vasilisa the Beautiful," "The Tale of Tsar Saltan," and "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel," I describe how Bilibin created a new sphere of cultural representation for imperial Russia at the turn of the century. I inspect early Bilibin's work through three theoretical lenses: *Art Nouveau*, Russian folk art, and Orientalism. In so doing, I demonstrate how Ivan Bilibin realized an imaginative "third sphere" that reflected an artistic and cultural identity belonging neither to the West nor the East, but strictly to Russia itself.

[8] "Folk Art of the Russian North" (No.10, 1904) by Ivan Bilibin is an example of such introductions. See Mikhail Kiselev "Graphic Design and Russian Art Journals of the Early Twentieth Century" , 1989.

Chapter 2

Bilibin and His Work Examined

2.1 – *Fin-de-siècle, début-de-siècle:* The Global Impact of *Art Nouveau*

The international aesthetic movement known as *Art Nouveau* was massively influential popular during its ascendancy, which spanned the 1890s to the 1910s, a time of great global socio-political change. Following its emergence in Brussels, the movement found its way into the French scene, where its momentum grew with its international exposure through the 1900 *Exposition universelle*. *Art Nouveau* and allied styles—*Jugendstil* in Germany, The Modern Style in Great Britain, *Modern* in the Russian Empire—constituted a movement with many goals, one that embraced the changing world and a diversification in influence, as well as the rejection of traditional forms of art that many modern artists felt had come to be exhausted of their potential for innovation. Mass production made possible by the industrial revolution, trade and globalization, and scientific advances urged artists to look more deeply at how a heavily industrialized world might coexist with nature.[9] The element of scientific evolution does not negate the attention called to the human environment; it instead appeared alongside a rise in spirituality, which connected humans to nature through art and as a counterpoint to the radical rationalism of the previous century.

Nature is perhaps the most heavily emphasized aesthetic concern in *Art Nouveau*. Organic lines, delicate detailing, and dynamic movement are key aspects of the *fin de siècle* movement, so much so that it was dubbed *Style coup de foue* ("whiplash") in Belgium, indicative of both its sharply curving lines and its dynamism. As Jeremy Howard states in his text *Art*

[9] See Jeremy Howard, "Introduction" in *Art Nouveau: International and national styles in Europe* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 4.

Nouveau: International and National Styles in Europe, while *Art Nouveau* did not achieve its look by reflecting nature or recreating the forms itself, it was still "dependent on a feeling for nature, an understanding of its rhythms, its organic potential and means."[10] *Art nouveau* was an embroidered impression of the natural world, set in contrast to the manmade.

One of the most notable sources of inspiration for *Art Nouveau* was *Japonisme*, a term used to describe the popularity and syncretic influence of Japanese art and design on painting, drawing and printing in Western artistic circles. This typically manifested through the flattening of space, figures, and objects, simplification of color schemes, the use of bold shapes and stark hues, and rhythmic arrangement in composition. Japanese art also placed great emphasis on nature, which was reflected in the delicate naturalism and appreciation for organic objects and themes in many *japoniste* works. Such effects were first embraced by the French (the term Japonisme was coined by a French art critic Philippe Burty), but was rapidly adopted throughout western Europe, which tended to follow the French lead in the arts. The Russian *modern* artists, who were undoubtedly swayed by Japanese design and artistic principles, were fellow adherents in the same web of influences that informed their colleagues in *Art Nouveau* communities to the West (Fig. 2.1).

[10] See Jeremy Howard, "Introduction" in *Art Nouveau: International and national styles in Europe* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 6.

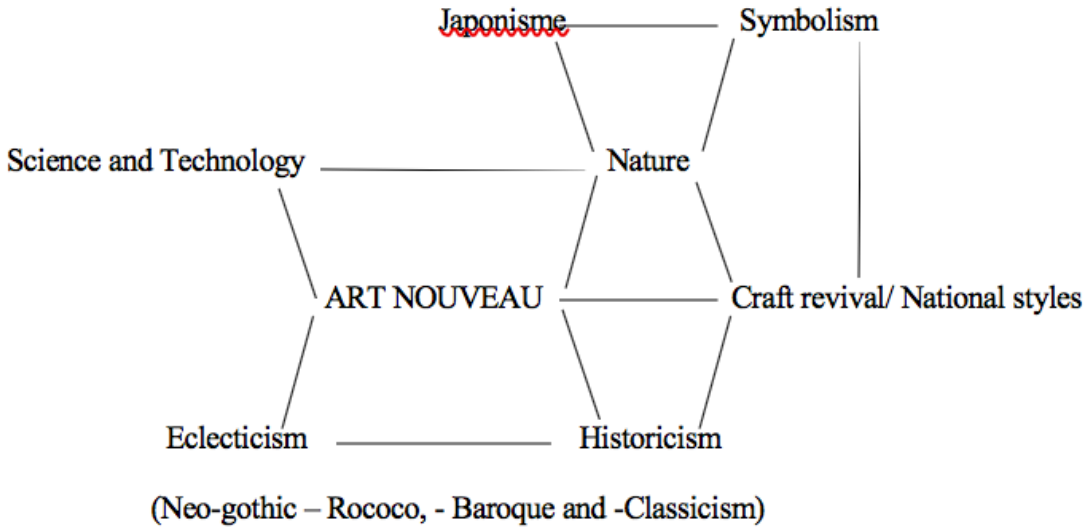

Fig 2.1. Art *Nouveau:* Sources and interrelations[11]

The variety in influences meant that *Art Nouveau* necessarily entailed certain paradoxical ideals. For one, the movement embraced *l'art pour l'art,* or "art for art's sake," seeking to divorce the role of art from notions of morality, politics, and functional utility. At the same time, breaking down hierarchies in the arts was another prominent goal; *Art Nouveau* sought to erase the distinctions between *haute* and popular and applied arts. Hector Guimard's arched entryway to the Abbesses Paris metro station in Montmartre designed for the 1900 *Exposition universelle* (figure 2.2) is a notable example of this fusion of high style and utilitarian design.[12] In contrast to past movements in which only members of the higher social classes were considered the audience for exhibited art, *Art Nouveau* began a conversation on the convention of artistic

[11] See Jeremy Howard, "Introduction" in *Art Nouveau: International and national styles in Europe* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 4.

[12] Figure 1 "File: Abbesses entrance 1.jpg." *Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository*. 3 Oct 2019, 07:12 UTC. 23 Feb 2020, 04:56 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Abesses_entrance_1.jpg&oldid=369176509>.

hierarchy and classicism, encouraging a broader swathe of society to experience art. Rather than the creation of art as an object to be exhibited on a pedestal within the tight constraints of a gallery, art was reconceived as open to appreciation by all through its application in everyday objects, such as poster graphics, furniture, silverware, architecture, and indeed even the entrance to a train station.

Figure 2.2 Hector Guimard. Abbesses entrance, Paris Metro. "File: Abbesses entrance 1.jpg." *Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository*. 3 Oct 2019, 07:12 UTC. 23 Feb 2020, 04:56 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Abesses_entrance_1.jpg&oldid=369176509>.

But the ornate aesthetics of *Art Nouveau* stood in notable contrast to its goals of social relevance and the aesthetic enhancement of public spaces. Its lavish ornamentation and intricacy in detail allowed for the juxtaposition of art versus the objects to which it was applied.

As described earlier, the *Art Nouveau* style had a global impact, helping to establish independent artistic identities for many communities through the merging of the distinctive *Art*

Nouveau "look" with traditional aesthetics particular to each region, including inspiration and themes drawn from folk culture. In its various national allied schools, this manifested as a contrast between a general desire to participate in a transformative global movement, but without sacrificing local traditions which were under threat of extinction due to globalization and mass production. Thus, *Art Nouveau* was more than simply a movement that looked to discard past traditions. With the rise of romantic nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century before the invention of the new modern style, many artists continued to look for means of reinforcing national identity through artistic vision. Some approached their efforts through the revitalization of folk art, albeit in modified forms more suited the modernizing world, while others did so through the engagement of other cultural motifs found in religion, fairy tales, and other ethnic or societal traditions.[13]

The desire to explore new possibilities along with the rest of the world was no different in imperial Russia. The *Art Nouveau* movement took hold the interest of Russian artists quickly after its emergence in the late nineteenth century. It was a time of sweeping change in Russian society, foreshadowing the even more revolutionary upheavals to come a few decades later. This anticipation of transformation was reflected in Russian artistic production at the turn of the century by artists such as those working within the *Mir iskusstva* community, which included not only painters, but sculptors, graphic and interior designers, architects, writers, and composers as well. All shared a common interest both in participation in the international *Art Nouveau* movement, and in the cultivation of a distinctively Russian branch. *Mir iskusstva*'s role can be directly linked to the development of the Russian model of *Art Nouveau*, known as *Modern* (other titles including *Russkii Modern,* Russian Symbolism, etc.), which is characterized by its

[13] For more details on the idea of *Art nouveau* book and its role of carrying a unique nationalistic personality see Lorraine Janzen Kooistra "Aesthetes and the Art of the Art-Nouveau Book" in *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Scholar Press), 1995.

deep ties to neo-nationalism, similar to its German counterpart, *Jugendstil.* There is little question that the global and local changes experienced in Russia—among them the rise and decline of neo-nationalism in the nineteenth century and the urbanization that followed the abolition of serfdom in 1861—led to an interest by those working within the empire to take part in the popular modern style. Russia was not only attempting to economically catch up with the rest of the industrialized world, but was searching for an identity to call its own, a longstanding anxiety about its ambiguous location between the East and the West, which had been exacerbated repeatedly by its history of frustrated attempts to assimilate into western European culture and politics. The already changing atmosphere of the empire triggered the reemergence of the conversation on national identity, and *Mir iskusstva* avidly took part.

The rebirth of Russian visual arts heavily relied on the integration of Russian folk culture into the modern, unlike in previous eras when artists had tended to take inspiration from Western academies, stemming from the stark class divisions in artistic privilege and access. The effects of a highly stratified economic society were clearly visible, not only in terms of unequal ability to engage with the fine arts, but also by subjects depicted in those arts. Issues of representation and visibility determined not only what kinds of human subjects were depicted in works of art, but also which cultures were to be reflected in them. In a sense, prior to the art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Russian "high" art was not authentically Russian, as in large part it merely echoed other artistic cultures, most prominently those of France. Prior to the introduction of *Art Nouveau* and the *Mir iskusstva* group, high art simply mirrored the upper-class Russian culture, which was undeniably detached from Russian national cultures. Many members of the aristocracy were more proficient in the French language than Russian, and unlikely to have any familiarity or interest in the national folkways. However, a wave of neo-nationalism and the

introduction of Slavophile ideologies opened avenues for the re-examination of Russian indigenous cultural heritage by artists, not only as a folk craft but as an essential component of high art, just as had been made possible by other branches of *Art Nouveau* across Europe.

Ivan Bilibin was a key member of the *Mir iskusstva* group and shared their goal of "Russifying" the fine arts. Bilibin's illustrative watercolor pieces, with their ornate detail and organic motifs, played a major role in the Russian *Art Nouveau* movement, *Russkii modern*. Though Bilibin was not a proponent for the muscular nationalism advocated by Slavophiles in prior decades, his interest in Russian folk culture was reflected heavily in his choice of subjects.[14] The majority of Bilibin's most renowned and influential works are ekphrastic interpretations of Russian folk fairy tales or folktales in verse by Alexander Pushkin. These works are not only technically masterful, but also reflect the major motives of the *Mir iskusstva* circle.

2.2 – Folk Art: The Reemergence of tradition

Folk revivalism played a major role in the artistic dialogue from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, most notably through the *Art Nouveau* movement. Artistic academies in Russia and other Slavic regions, along with those in many Western countries all developed variations of folk-art revival merged with modern design. Although the outcomes varied in terms of design and function, the distinctiveness of each sub-movement relied on individual local cultures.

With the heightened influence of the middle class facilitated by the growing working population with the rise in capitalism came an increase in consciousness toward cultures

[14] See H.N. Abrams. Ivan Bilibin. Bilibin Ivan I͡Akovlevich, (1982).

previously unexplored in the fine arts. As the bourgeoisie began to wield greater economic and social power, subjects of interest of the artistic community began to shift accordingly. Rather than following previous trends of focusing on recording the lives and cultures of the upper classes, romanticized depictions of the ordinary peoples and their lives became fashionable.

The evolving economy was not the only reason for the shift toward heightened engagement with folk art. The nineteenth century was a time in which concepts of nationalism emerged as ethnic communities began to seek to distinguish themselves from their neighbors. Before this socio-political movement, cultural identity was generally tied to traits such as language, religion, and ethnicity. For many, nationality had not been such a strong self-identifier, perhaps due in part to the frequent changes in political ruling families and parties. With the lack of a stable governing body, the general population's interaction with government was unlikely to conjure strong feelings of national unity. However, triggered by historic events such as the French revolution and the consolidation of ruling powers and borders throughout Europe, people's sense of national identity began to evolve. The major shifts in power that arose with the reorganization of the French government following the overthrow of the monarchy and the rise of Napoleon’s legions, as well as the strengthening and centralization of other power establishments across the European continent played a significant role in giving birth to nationalism as we understand it today. Popular and academic culture also reaffirmed this trend of nationalism with the introduction of “Romantic Nationalism” as a nascent genre in literature, art and music, bolstering patriotic enthusiasms among the general population. Bilibin contributed to this explosion in nationalism as well, most significantly in his reimagining of the verses of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. With this choice of subject matter, he not only rendered

folktales well-loved by the Russian people, but by incorporating the works created by a revered Russian poet, Bilibin helped boost pride in the nation.

While the reemergence of the folk-art genre in nineteenth and twentieth centuries Russia was amplified through the introduction of *Art Nouveau*, interest in the field did not begin as a product of the international art movement. The growing relevance of folk and popular art can be traced farther back in the century, to the expansion of the greater Slavic region. Unlike the other European empires, such as the British or the French which began to expand outside of the European continent into the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, Russia's expansion was confined within the Eurasian continent, with the forced incorporation of neighboring territories. A large portion of the acquired territories extended into central Asia, which introduced a vast variety of Eastern cultures into the empire, bringing them into close proximity to others living within its national borders.[15] Although the presence of these Asiatic societies was not unknown to the European population of the Russian mainland previous to the imperial expansion, the inclusion of such traditions into what was considered authentic Russian culture began to alter how some viewed their national identity. The forever looming question of the Russian empire's identity—whether they were Europeans, Asians, both, and neither—was further complicated by the inclusion of new ethnic groups with unfamiliar customs.

With the rise of nationalistic ideologies and new centralized superpowers across Europe combined with additional alien faces newly representing the Russian empire, came a new pro-Slavic identity often referred to as Slavophilia. Slavophilism as an ideology sprang from the nineteenth century Russian Romantic period, which advocated for the development of the Russian empire through the implementation of values and customs that were traditional to

[15] See Jeffrey Brooks, "The Russian Nation Imagined: The Peoples of Russia as Seen in Popular Imagery, 1860s- 1890s" in *Journal of Social History*, 2010. 535

Russia's early history. The "Slavophile" intellectual movement, which sought to create an empire freed from the influence of western Europe, was established in 1839 with the publication of two articles advocating for this new philosophy: one by A.S. Khomiakov and a response to that by I.V. Kirieevskii.[16] These advocated disassociating the Russian identity from the Western European one in order to revert to an pre-Petrine form unpolluted by western pressure. Unsurprisingly, the Slavophilic sentiment influenced not only political and intellectual institutions but the arts as well. With this, Russia was to experience its own artistic renaissance, buttressed by a major international art movement as well as a popular domestic sociopolitical movement.

A more specific evocation to traditional Slavic culture can be seen in Ivan Bilibin's works and the presence of *teremok* – a Slavic folk dwelling – in his fairytale worlds. *Teremok,* (as represented in figure 2.3) which is a small detached wooden house, unique for its ornate carvings and bright colors, make appearances in Bilibin's narrative illustrations, such as in figure 2.4 (discussed in detail in chapter three).[17] The scene depicts the Slavic witch, *Baba Yaga*'s, hut looming behind the central figure of the image, Vasilisa. Disregarding the chicken's legs that support the hut and add an uncanniness to the witch's abode, the detailing surrounding the windows and the very recognizable log cabin-look is a direct reference to the make of *teremok.* An Orientalist reading into the *teremok* is also relevant in Bilibin's works, as *teremok* is a diminutive form of *terem,* which were elite Muscovite women's seclusions. Long-held misconceptions of the origins of *terem* being derived from Oriental practices.[18]

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[16] See Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism, 1856- 1870*, 1856. 37-38.
[17] See John E. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art Group"*, 1979. 44.
[18] See Nancy Shields Kollmann "The Seclusion of Elite Muscovite Women", 1983 for a more detailed discussion.

Figure 2.3. Sergey Malyutin. Teremok house in Talashinko, Russia. 1901- 1902. By Krassotkin - Own work, CC0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29828800

Figure 2.4. Ivan Bilibin. *Vasilisa the Beautiful* (1899- 1900). - skazka.com.ru, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4253074

While folk elements are scattered throughout Bilibin's works, the chief example of a folk-art form that was revitalized by the *Art Nouveau* movement as well as Slavophilism was the art of the *lubok. Lubok* (plural: *lubki*) was a widely circulated form of popular print designed for everyday consumption. These Russian folk pictures have been dated back to as early as the seventeenth century, with woodcut prints being its most common form of execution. The earliest examples of these *lubki* are icons crudely painted onto paper, boards, or other surfaces that were accessible to the peasantry.[19] Widespread production of these prints persisted well into the nineteenth century, by which the form of printing had evolved into lithography and more complex printing techniques, such as etching. While the first examples of *lubok* were basic paper icons cheap enough to be afforded by even the poorest of Russians, who required them to fulfill ritual obligations to the Orthodox Church, the most influential forms of *lubki* were those depicting secular matters. Being a graphic art popular among the lower-class population rather than for those who had additional spending power (they were also consumed by those of the upper classes, although at a much smaller scale), the subject matter represented in *lubok* prints naturally began to revolve around commoners as well. While images of aristocracy and knights in armor, as well as sacred themes, were still present in these pictures, visualizations of the lives and livelihoods of the peasant class and their folktales (which had previously been orally communicated) began to be produced for the first time.[20] As the processes of print production became faster and cheaper with the introduction of technologies such as etching, engraving, and lithography, the *lubok* also transformed.[21] Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, *lubok*

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[19] See Alla Sytova, *The Lubok: Russian Folk Pictures: 17th to 19th Century.*, 1984. 6.
[20] See Alla Sytova, *The Lubok: Russian Folk Pictures: 17th to 19th Century.*, 1984. 7. – insert image 27/28 taken from this book showing examples of
[21] See Alla Sytova, *The Lubok: Russian Folk Pictures: 17th to 19th Century.*, 1984. 9. The source states that the biggest *lubok* "factory" was owned by an Ilya Akhmetyev, who focused on *lubok* production through means of copper engraving. Sytova cites the influence of Western printing techniques on these new forms of *lubok* production as well.

production grew as an industry. Not only did these new *lubki* depict images of secular life, but they also began to include humorous texts, in some ways resembling twentieth century comic strips; lighthearted and amusing illustrations that can be easily consumed. Thus, while the original *lubok* form was an affordably made icon at times inscribed with religious text, *lubki* were now produced as entertainment for the common folk.

Lubok are notable for their simplified visual style in both form and color palette. The line qualities of the prints are simple and direct. Decorative details are spare, with most lines present on the piece serving a specified purpose, such as outlining an object or representing shadows. The weights of lines are also minimalist, with few observable shifts, leaving most visual cues to be made by silhouettes. Forms are also clean and distinct. Most of the images in the prints are made of combinations of simple blocks and shapes, which are filled with either more lines to indicate change in tone, or with color if pigments were available for use. Another prominent quality of the *lubok* was its use of a borders. Although by no means ornate, the border was a detail found in most printed pieces of *lubki.* These often comprised either a single heavy line or, more typically two parallel lines to create a thicker border, which were either left blank or colored. Simplicity is another major quality that is present in the visual composition of these pictures. In images depicted in a *lubok*, the subject's form is most commonly flattened, with the emphasis placed on one or two central figures in the foreground. Surrounding them there may be a few objects or motifs supporting the narrative of the image, with the background left blank in the simplest prints or engraved with more elaboration in more complex pieces.[22] Western artistic rules of proportion and perspective were not always followed, which led these prints to be considered an inferior art form compared to those produced by academically trained artists.

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[22] E.I. Itkina, *Russkii risovannii lubok kontsa XVIII - nachala XX veka: Iz sobraniia Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeia Moskva = Loubok-Russian Popular Prints from the Late 18th-Early 20th Centuries: from the Collection of the State Historical Museum Moscow,* 1992. 46.

Interestingly, while the production of *lubki* required varied skillsets such as engraving, etching, printing, and drafting as well as literacy, the simplified form of the pieces brought about its categorization as part of the “primitivistic” aesthetic system. Although what constitutes "primitive" art form is arguable, the *lubok*, due to its non-observance of western artistic principles, was not generally considered a learned art, unlike other forms of print such as those found in illuminated manuscripts of Western Europe. (Although it could be argued that *lubki* depicting religious themes were closer on the spectrum toward illuminated manuscripts given their high level of detail and adornment). This is one of the most active factors that determined folk art as a practice unfitting to represent the Russian empire, as determined by the nation's westernized upper-class citizens, until both the *Art Nouveau* movement and the Slavophile movement encouraged a cultural resuscitation.

Ivan Bilibin’s illustrations were heavily influenced by the art of the *lubok*, conceptually and visually. Both Bilibin and *lubok* artists reimagined widely circulated oral Russian folk tales into something that could be comprehended visually, allowing for a means of their enjoyment and a wider audience. For example, the tale of *Baba Yaga* has been reproduced numerous times between the two sources giving a fresh face to an age-old legend with each new version. Compositionally, Bilibin followed the *lubok* conventions of placing the main subject of the page in the center foreground, for obvious emphasis on the importance of the figure to the narrative of the image. Furthermore, the presence of the borders surrounding each of Bilibin’s images was highly influenced by *lubok* conventions as well. The framing of these illustrations ties the pieces in the closest way to traditional Russian graphics, since without its influence the Russian cultural uniqueness of Bilibin's images would be greatly impaired. The most evident feature of Bilibin’s paintings—their highly decorative details—is where the western influence of *Art Nouveau* is

most visible. The Slavic borders are filled with intricate designs that encourage the narrative being played out for the viewer, and the heightened emphasis on the organic and wild form of nature through the elaborate use of line is highly evocative of the French aesthetic. With the two influences united on the page, Bilibin engendered a new visual style incorporating both Russian and Western aesthetics.

2.3 – Othering of the Self: *Vostokovedenie* and internal Orientalism

The Orient has always been a significant presence to the culture and life of the Russian empire. The expansive lands south of the empire increasingly became the object of Russian curiosity, attention, and anxiety as they advanced into the modern era, accentuated by an ever more integrated globe. With such interests in the Asian territories emerged Orientalism, an aesthetic attitude that made a lasting imprint in the world of art. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a central text critiquing the Orientalist stance.[23] The book, which appropriately features Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Snake Charmer* (1880) on its cover, introduces Said's concept of "Orientalism" as a tool for conquest and colonialization by "the West" upon their neighbors to the East.[24] As Said points out, it is first and foremost crucial for one to understand that "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature…just as the Occident itself is not" either.[25] Although cultural differences between Europe and its eastern neighbors had been a topic of discussion for centuries, the late

[23] Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 2004.
[24] Jean-Léon Gérôme's 1880 painting, *Snake Charmer*, exemplifies the concept and application of Orientalism within European art through a voyeuristic view and the mystification as well as the sexualization of non-European bodies and culture.
[25] See Edward Said, "Introduction" in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). 4.

eighteenth century marked a clear transition of Orientalism into an institutional tool for colonial management, through the distribution of ideas and perceptions about the East. The emphasis the author places on how the concept of the Orient as contraposed to Western civilization was produced through the efforts of European literary, artistic and political academia. This is central to recognizing how Orientalism implements its complex relationship of power and cultural dominance over the East. The Orient as we understand it is heavily based on the image of the "Other." The alterity of the Orient dictated both what was to be considered alien to the West, and what was native to the East. This othering of the Orient was a difficult and problematic undertaking, as the notion of a monolithic West itself was becoming untenable due to the vast expansion of its empires.[26] Orientalism thus influenced not only lands outside of the European borders, but European identity as well.

Said's text focuses primarily on Orientalism as it functioned in and out of British and French imperial domains, as two of the largest empires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through their continued expansion into the Orient, Americas, and Africa. It is thus unsurprising that Orientalism as found within the context of the Russian empire and its cultural attitudes toward the East operated differently from how it manifested in Western Europe. Said's concept of Orientalism does not entirely apply to the Russian empire, largely due to the geographical differences from western Europe in relation to the Orient. Said himself briefly acknowledges that Russia does not fit as neatly

[26] See Michael Kemper "Russian Orientalism" Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History, 2018. And Alexander Etkind "Worldliness" in *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press), 2011.

in his discussion of Orientalism, due to its situation in the middle ground between the traditional West and East. Russia shares extensive borders with the Orient, affording it a greater an intimacy with the East, and in fact that Russia was often considered a part of the Orient by Western Europeans. Its geography also meant that, to the Russian mind, the Orient was different from that in the eyes of the British, French, or (in later years) Americans. To an Englishman of the day, India may have typified the Orient, while to an American the same role may have been assigned to countries of the Far East. To a Russian, however, the idea of the Orient was more likely to evoke central Asian regions and the Ottoman-controlled Middle East. This is not to say, however, that the beliefs Russians held toward *their* Orient were vastly different from those of more westerly nations, which is why Said's concept of Orientalism retains its relevance to imperial Russian and its cultural productions with only slight modifications.

Perhaps the most important difference in Russia's Orientalist lens arose from the fact that othering of the East was a more ambivalent undertaking as, unlike the British or the French, it was more difficult to draw clear boundaries between Russian identity and the Asian identities that surrounded them geographically, politically, and culturally. Not were parts of the Orient in some real sense interior to Russia, ,but to the cultural leaders of western Europe, Russia had never been considered fully Occidental.[27] To western Europe, Russia's lack of participation in the western Enlightenment demoted the Slavic empire to a level akin to that of other Asian civilizations, which viewed as uncultured and

[27] Ezequiel Adamosvsky states in the article "Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810—1880" that Russia was constructed as a "land of absence", a national identity characterized by qualities the empire lacked, rather than what was – the absence of elements considered essential to (Western European) civilization, development, and modernity".

savage. Marquis la Custine's *La Russie en 1839* recounts a French noble's perception of the Russians as backward barbarians who were only a generation past their true "Tartar" character.[28] The stigmatization and assumed inferiority of the "Oriental" peoples persisted through beliefs such as these, and the Russian empire was very much a part of that narrative. The reduction of the Orient into a single Oriental identity created an overly simplistic image of the world, divided into a benighted East and enlightened West. The issue then was to define which countries and cultures belonged on either side of that divide.

The vagueness in the distinction between Russia and the Orient came not only from external, Occidental sources, as exemplified in De Maistre's remark "*grattez le Russe et vous trouvez le Tatare*" ("scratch a Russian and find a Tartar"). Many Russians were also keenly aware of their distinct roots.[29] While the acceptance and even embracement of non-European heritage was encouraged by the Slavophiles, who sought to reject all western influence and revert to the culture and tradition of pre-Petrine Russia, the Oriental identity was intensely rejected, both outside and within the Russian institution. The constant threat of the rebellion from the growing population of imperialized peoples of Central Asia, possible aggression from the Ottoman East, and the newly arising threat from imperial Japanese were all forces capable of compromising the imperial domain. Of course, the general sentiment of white Europeans as being the

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[28] Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 79.
[29] See David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "The Curious Fate of Edward Said in Russia", *Études de Lettres,* 2014), 4.

summit of culture and civilization also played a large role in why Russians so often sought to reject their Asiatic roots.

It is with this contradiction in mind that one can come to understand the kind of Orientalism which was unique to the Russians, which I call "internal Orientalism." While Said's conceptual development documented in *Orientalism* remains applicable to the Russian context, what is found within the empire and accelerated beginning the mid-eighteenth century, along with Slavophilism, represents a much more complex brand of Orientalism which functioned through the *orientalization*, or othering, of not only foreign cultures and peoples, but of the self. Unlike the British or the French who used Orientalism singularly as a tool of colonization in an effort to acquire and dominate expanses of the East, Russian orientalism cannot be understood as solely an imperial scheme of control, given that the act of *othering* was never purely imperialist in intent, simply because the *other* could not be othered in its entirety.

Orientalism in the arts made its appearance years before Bilibin ventured onto his projects of reimagining Russian folktales in illustrative form. The Russian Romantic era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the impact of the Orient as European concept, as poets like Pushkin made use of the idea to develop a freer, and more emotive manner of literary expression.[30] Russian Romanticism and internal Orientalism existed hand in hand prior to the artistic culture of the Silver Age during which Bilibin produced his work, in which the spontaneous overflow of emotion (an ideal

[30] See Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (New York: Oxford University Press.) 2011. 3.

of literary Romanticism in the West as well) was closely linked with the wildness and unrestrained image of the Oriental people. [31] Key features of the Orient, like its primitivism and barbarity was transformed into Romantic unrestraint and transferred to the Russian people. Thus "Orientals" were transformed into “romanticized peasant anarchists” known as *pugachevs*, after Yemelyan Pugachev, a Cossack rebel and royal impostor.[32]

As the *pugachev* character type indicates, Said’s work can be applied to the view of the East, or Asia beyond the borders of the Russian empire, but also domestically toward its own population. Internal Orientalization of the peasant masses is also observable in the expression “*tëmnye liudi”* (“dark people”), a category which was not developed through the consumption of Orientalized visual depictions or rituals.[33] Aside from in folklore and later in *lubok* prints*,* the life of the Russian peasant could only be examined through observations by the Russian upper classes, or the observation of foreign individuals. The disconnect between the observed and the observer effectively othered the peasants as an internal population alienated from the “general” bourgeois Russian population (although the bourgeoisie were unquestionably a demographic minority),. While the Russian elites and the Russian peasant may have shared a Slavic ethnicity, the peasant culture, tradition, and existence were just as mysterious and dangerous as of those in the geographical East.

Ivan Bilibin adopted Orientalist attitudes ,including internal or self-Orientalism, in his illustrative works which reimagined traditional folklore of the Slavic region. A multifaceted

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[31] See Susan Layton, Chapter 5 “The National Stake in Asia” in *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquests of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy.* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 86.
[32] See Susan Layton, chapter 5 “The National Stake in Asia” in *Russisan Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy.* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 1994. 87.
[33] See Hugh Ragsdale, Chapter 5 “Culture, Character, Psyche: A Literary Excursion” in *The Russian Tragedy—The Burden of History.* (New York: Taylor and Francis), 110.

dialogue is created in each of Bilibin's images, where "otherings" are directed at multiple figures in a single frame. The mosaic of different existences and perceptions precisely exposes the intricate conversation of identity that *fin de siècle* Russia as a culture and people undertook during a time of great transformation and modernization.

Chapter 3

Art Nouveau: Modern graphic design and its application in Bilibin's illustrations

3.1 – "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" and "Vasilisa The Beautiful"

The story "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" was first recorded in Aleksandr Afanas'ev's collection of Russian folktales. Afanas'ev, a nineteenth century ethnographer, collected fairytales and folklore from throughout the Russian empire, and went on to publish a multi-volume collection of stories.[34] "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" is structured as an extended folk epic combining shorter narratives that follow traditional narrative conventions. Russian folk tales were customarily orally communicated, due to the low literacy rates of the peasant class (which made up 80–90% of the Russian empire's population between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries), most stories of the folk tradition remained short to facilitate the work of storytellers. "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" includes representative features of several popular Russian story types, including the "youngest child" and "Ivan the Fool.". One key element of "youngest child" tales is a rivalry between three brothers. In many such tales, the youngest son is the underdog protagonist, who must develop into a reliable and independent man. This trope is also seen in "Ivan the Fool" stories, in which a man (almost always named Ivan), the youngest of his brothers, defeats the odds by exploiting characteristics that are initially perceived as flaws, such as youth, competitive siblings, naiveté, or inexperience, which latterly manifest as unexpected sophistication, wit, or

[34] See A.N. Afanas'ev et al. *Russian Fairy Tales.* Pantheon Books, 2017.

sheer luck. The lack of concrete geographical settings is also a major folkloric feature. In "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird and the Gray Wolf," for example, the setting is described as a "certain far-away tsardom, not in this Empire".

The story begins with a legendary firebird stealing a golden apple from a tree in the Tsar's garden. After the firebird continues to make off with his prized fruit, the Tsar commands his elder sons, Dimitri and Vasily, to capture it, promising half the Tsar's kingdom to the one who succeeded. These two very confident and ambitious sons await the arrival of firebird in the garden at night, but both fall asleep before it arrives, and miss their opportunity to capture the thief. The next day, they claim that the firebird never arrived, but the Tsar notices that another golden apple has gone missing, exposing the sons' dishonesty.

After his brothers' failure, the youngest son, Tsarevich Ivan, pleads with his father, the Tsar, to allow him to attempt to capture the firebird. Although initially reluctant because of Ivan's young age, the Tsar finally agrees, and again promises to grant the boy half of his kingdom should he succeed. The following night, Tsarevich Ivan, lies in wait by the golden apple tree. Once the bird appears, Ivan tries to grab it but fails only manages to pluck a single feather from the bird's tail.[35] He admits his failure to his father, at which the Tsar commands his older sons to go on a quest to capture the Firebird, in return for half of the kingdom. Once Dimitri and Vasily head off on their journey, they come across a crossroad with a sign indicating three different outcomes: the first path

[35] This will be the scene I am going to be analyzing later in this chapter as a key image expressing elements of *Art Nouveau (figure 1).*

promises pain and hunger to the traveler, the second states that the traveler will live while his horse dies, while the third path guarantees the life of the horse but states that the traveler will die instead. Confronted with these unappealing options, the two brothers stray from their mission, once again allowing Ivan to come forward as a new volunteer to find the legendary bird.

The 1899 book that includes this extended Russian folk tale includes a great many of Bilibin's decorative watercolors. The depiction of the scene in which Tsarevich Ivan snatches a tail feather from the firebird, with the tree bearing golden apples shown in the background illustrates several characteristic features of Bilibin's novel aesthetic (Fig. 3.1).

The “certain far-away tsardom” alluded to in the tale is interpreted as a mystical and imaginative place, but one that is nonetheless unmistakably Russian. The Ivan the fool convention provides a sense of traditionalism and cultural familiarity, but the visuals are clearly in the *Art Nouveau* style. Excluding the garment worn by Ivan, which appears to be an ornate rendition of a *kosovorotka*, or traditional Russian shirt. Although lavish in appearance, the garment is shown in a simplified through form, with little detail in the textiles lining the collar, sleeves, and hem, but still very Russian; the traditional red coloring of the garments provides a visual cue to the protagonist's nation of origin,. The indefinite interpretation of geography that is allowed with the elusive text is translated here in visual form, by eliding some key identifying features of the *kosovorotka*.

Exploration of the use of lines is pronounced in Bilibin’s watercolors as well. Graphic art was an emerging genre, as the use of printing and mass publication expanded as a consequence of technological advances. A dominant feature of the image is the fluid

line that guides the viewer's eye across the page to ensure no details are missed. Organic lines that are so central to whiplash effect of the *Art Nouveau* movement with its abundance of dynamic lines in a single composition, is evident in Bilibin's illustration. However, unlike some *Art Nouveau* illustrators, who relied entirely on line work to decorate entire canvases with elaborate repeating patterns, Bilibin leaves his forms mostly unfilled by line, preferring to use color as a filling agent. The serpentine lines paying homage to the lively line qualities of *Art Nouveau* are most visible in Bilibin's depictions of natural objects, such as the large magical tree that sits in the background, filling almost the entirety of the piece. Though the artist avoids convolution by excessive lines in a small space, intricate features of the Tsar's apple tree are imagined with golden fruit hanging from branches that stretch across the darkness of the background, framing Tsarevich Ivan.

The organic linework extends beyond the central image into the borders framing the scene as well. The margins are filled with refined details, from the intricate shear-like firebird tail feathers in the upper right and left corners complement the highly ornamental feathers on the four silhouettes of the birds below the central image; are all reminiscent of framing techniques often embodied in western European *Art Nouveau* lithographs. The variety of motifs used to decorate the marginal space bordering the image of Tsarevich Ivan and the Firebird is an interesting feature of the complete page. Rather than using a singular repetition of motifs of pattern, Bilibin includes a variety of designs formed with meandering brush strokes. The use of this framing device also recalls the *Art Nouveau* emphasis on disrupting hierarchies in the arts. Through this technique, Bilibin elevates

mass-produced printed works accessible to the masses from modest illustrations into "framed" works of fine art.

The choice to show the firebird's tail as peacock-like feathers was also directly influenced by *Art Nouveau.* This bird had become popular in the *fin-de-siècle* era, beginning with the Aesthetic movement and later in *Art Nouveau* as a motif distinctive to the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century (I further explore the Orientalist implications in Chapter 5). The unique and highly exotic coloration of the peacock with its vividly iridescent blues and greens made this bird ideally suited to the decadent aesthetic of the *Art Nouveau* movement and its hedonistic credo of "art for art's sake." An example of the peacock feathers' popularity can be seen in the furnishing fabrics produced by Arthur Silver's company, the Silver Studio, which was renowned for its exquisite wallpapers and upholstery.[36] The firebird was well established in Russian folklore long before Bilibin produced his illustrations, and was traditionally known for its glowing flame-colored feathers. Bilibin thus reinterpreted the bird by incorporating the peacock feathers in vogue at the time, again establishing a new, very Russian form of mannerism, in the third sphere between the modernity of *Art Nouveau* and the orthodoxy of the Russian fairytale.

[36] See Figure 3.2

Figure 3.1. Ivan Bilibin. Tsarevich Ivan plucking the Firebird's feather in "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf", 1899.- [1], [2], Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=459189

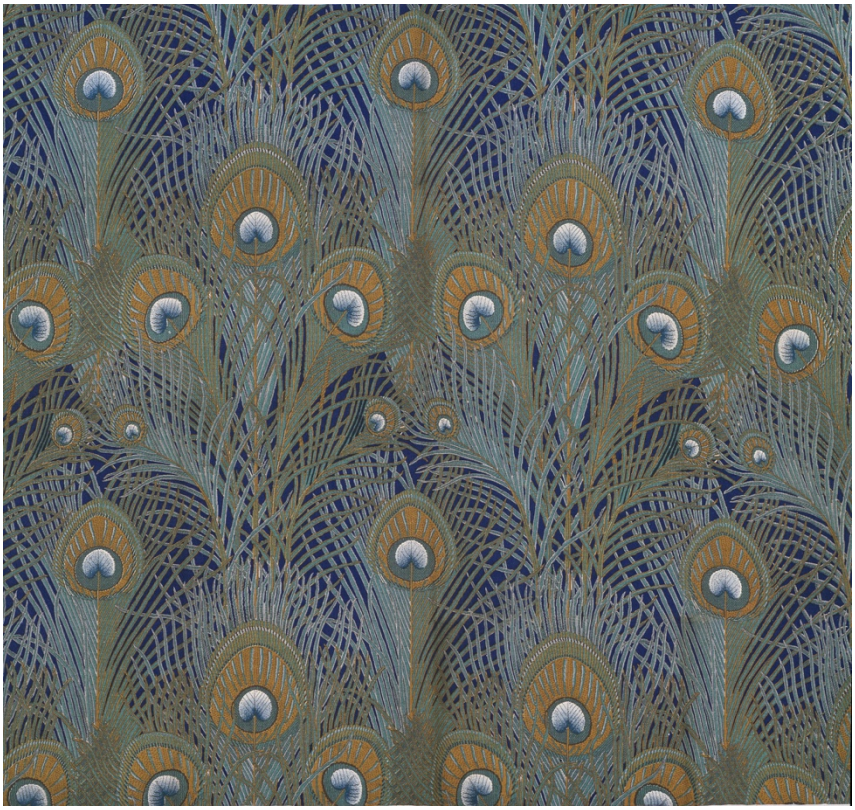


Figure 3.2. Arthur Silver. Roller-printed cotton furnishing fabric designed by the Silver Studio, 1887. V&A Collection.
https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78872/peacock-feathers-furnishing-fabric-silver-arthur/

The Russian fairytale “Vasilisa the Beautiful” was also collected and published by Aleksandr Afanas’ev, the same ethnographer who documented “Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf,” This fairytale follows several narrative conventions common to “wicked stepmother,” “Cinderella,”, and “witch and wise maiden" tales, all of which center around a female protagonist who must overcome a crisis. This story type is common not only in Russia but throughout Europe and other regions of the world.

In this short tale, again set in a distant and unidentified land, Vasilisa's mother falls ill, and on her deathbed gives her young daughter a doll, which she states will protect her during times of need. After her mother’s death, Vasilisa’s father marries a widow with two daughters of

her own. Her stepmother and stepsisters begin to abuse Vasilisa, and their spite grows stronger as Vasilisa grows lovelier. It is revealed that the doll Vasilisa received from her mother is magical and had helped her through years of adversity and allowed her to grow ever more beautiful. One day, as the three girls are completing chores assigned by their mother, the light in their home goes out. The two stepsisters order Vasilisa to visit *Baba Yaga* , a fearsome witch figure in Russian folklore, in her hut to ask for some light. With the help of her enchanted doll, Vasilisa survives her encounter with *Baba Yaga*, to her stepsisters' great surprise and disappointment. Bilibin's illustration below (Fig. 3.3) imagines the moment Vasilisa the Beautiful exits *Baba Yaga*'s bewitched hut with a human skull emitting beams of light from its eye sockets given to her by the witch as a reward for completing a set of challenging tasks.

Stylistic elements of *Art Nouveau* seen in the illustrations for "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" are also found in Bilibin's illustrations for "Vasilisa the Beautiful." Both fairytales were illustrated in a short period between 1899 and 1900. The focus on the natural world and vegetation are even more prominent in the image depicting Vasilisa's escape from *Baba Yaga*'s hut, as seen in Fig. 3.3. A striking feature about the illustration is the extensive use of the mushroom motif, which is not only present in the forest surrounding Vasilisa but extends out into the border enclosing the scene.[37] Bilibin's choice of mushrooms rather than trees, vines or flowers as decorative flora reflects the vital role of these fungi in Russian culture, where mushroom picking played a prominent role in the diet and daily life of the average Russian. Thus Bilibin blends a feature common to the experience of ordinary people, especially the peasant and serf populations, with *Art Nouveau*'s interest in flora and fauna as a counter-

[37] Gothic imagery was associated with *Art nouveau* artists such as the *World of Art* group, including Bilibin, who used gothic aesthetic devices with political intentions to shock the bourgeoisie and to "assert the Promethean role" of the artist. See more in Jeffrey Brooks "The Gothic Tradition in Russian and Early Soviet Culture" *Russian Literature,* 2019. 13.

motif to urbanization and modernization, creating an *art moderne*, or a version of *Art Nouveau* adapted to the Russian identity.[38] The aesthetic created via the intermingling of the two characteristics is visually reflected in Bilibin's works, establishing the "third sphere" bridging western *Art Nouveau*, and the themes and traditions of imperial Russia.

Figure 3. Ivan Bilibin, "Vasilisa the Beautiful". 1899-1900.- skazka.com.ru, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4253074

[38] See Valentina Pavlovna Wasson and R. Gordon Wasson *Mushrooms, Russia and Hisotry,* 1957.

Chapter 4

Balancing tradition and modernity: *Art Nouveau* and folk art

"For me, generally speaking, fairytales,
bylinas, and hymns are bound up together
with embroidery, printed patterns on cloths,
wood carvings, folk architecture, folk
pictures and so forth…"

- I. Ia. Bilibin

4.1 – "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" and the metamorphosis of folk art into the modern Russian aesthetic

Bilibin, who was born and raised near St. Petersburg, did not have much opportunity to engage with the folk art of Russia during his early years as an artist. Upon entering the academy, Bilibin finished his studies in St. Petersburg and Munich, and continued to train within the confines of western artistic convention. His outlook changed, however, in 1902 when he embarked on a two-year expedition to northern Russia to identify artistic traditions that had not been heavily influenced by the western European academy. Sponsored by Princess Maria Tenisheva, an avid and wealthy collector of art and artifacts and a staunch supporter of *Mir iskusstva*, Bilibin encountered the world of Slavic folk art, which became his most significant artistic influence.[39] During this trip, Bilibin was able to directly interact with objects of everyday peasant life, which were unfamiliar to him as a young bourgeois artist, despite his shared identity

[39] See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 8.

as a native-born Russian. Through his examinations of these items, Bilibin was finally able to craft a fairytale world while remaining faithful to traditions of his home country.

In this chapter, I analyze Bilibin's 1905 illustrations of Alexander Pushkin's tale "The Tale of Tsar Saltan," (1831). Unlike the kind of fairytales and folklores collected and compiled by Aleksandr Afanas'ev, which included stories from the oral tradition and thus unassociated with named authors, Pushkin's fairytales were firmly in the literary tradition. Pushkin created a distinct form of fairytale in verse that remained situated within the classic Russian tradition of oral storytelling, while adding a level of sophistication lacking from its traditional forms. "The Tale of Tsar Saltan," was one of Pushkin's most famous and admired stories, which builds on well-established fairytale tropes, such as the "three siblings" tale, and its use of an "animal helper". However, through versification, Pushkin elevated the fairytale to a new plane of literary respectability. While this evolution of fairytale as literary culture is evident in Pushkin's work during the Russian Golden Age, the Silver Age that followed also brought new changes in the arts. Bilibin's complex and modern illustrations are clear examples of this evolution, as are other visionary works such as Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* (1900). Although Bilibin continued to shift the perception of fairytales through much of his long career, "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" was the first of a series of Pushkin stories illustrated by Bilibin, commissioned by the Department for the production of State Documents in 1904.[40]

"The Tale of Tsar Saltan" begins with three sisters, who express their desire to marry the tsar of their kingdom (the location of which is unspecified) in exchange for a promise to provide the tsar with some service. The eldest sister promises to cook, and the second to weave, while the youngest promises to bear the tsar a son. The tsar himself chooses the youngest for his bride, commanding her elder sisters to serve in his palace as cook and seamstress. Soon after he marries

[40] See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 184.

the youngest sister, the Tsar goes off to war, leaving her with her envious sisters. The new queen quickly then discovers she is pregnant and gives birth to a son, Gvidon. In the tsar's absence, the jealous sisters conspire with Gvidon's grandmother to rid themselves of the mother and newborn son, forcing them into a large barrel which they cast into the sea. In the barrel, the queen prays, and the sea takes pity on the two, giving safe landing on the island of Buyan.

Figure 4.1 shows Bilibin's illustration of the legendary island. Here again, natural motifs play an important role, reflecting the *Art Nouveau* influence. The foreground is fully occupied by wildflowers growing in abundance. There are no regular patterns to the organic forms on the page; the flora bloom riotously in all sizes, shapes and colors, directing the viewer's gaze to flit across the page. The opulence of the *Art Nouveau* aesthetic also shows in the garments worn by the two figures in the middle-ground, facing a city atop a hill. Similar to the traditional garb worn by Tsarevich Ivan (Fig. 3.1), the individuals in Fig. 4.1 also wear recognizably Slavic attire, even as the decorative details of the costumes suggest a more modern style.

The features of the *lubok* are clear in the image as well; the classic bordered edge is presented just as they were in the Russian popular print, but the folk influence is even stronger than in Bilibin's earlier work as the forms mimic the geometric appearance of many Russian folk motifs (Fig. 4.2). As the nineteenth century *lubok* (Fig. 4.2) exhibits in its modest yet essential border made up of a repeating grid-like pattern, the bottom fringe of Bilibin’s illustration (figure 4.1) replicates its simplicity and geometry. Unlike in earlier works (such as the mushroom-bedecked border shown in Fig. 3.3, which was repetitive but organic in form), Fig. 4.1 shows a border decorated with a repeating pattern of geometrically simple illustrations of a waterfowl. Bilibin's decision to evoke Slavic folk embroidery patterning, rather than adhering strictly to the conventions of Russian popular prints is another indicator of his cultivation of a "third sphere"

aesthetic. While *lubok* prints such as that shown in Fig. 4.2 most often frame the depicted scene, the margins were typically sparsely adorned, with only a single or double line surrounding the image, or no more than a simple linear pattern within the border. In contrast, Bilibin blends the *Art Nouveau* approach of lavish adornment with traditional forms, by incorporating motifs similar to those embroidery patterns found in Russian folk textiles (Fig 4.1). Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show samples of the style of traditional cross-stitching patterns Bilibin may have used to inform his illustrations, with their geometric renderings of organic images. Not only does Bilibin imitate the design and themes of Russian embroidery, but even the form mirrors the geometries demanded by cross-stitch techniques, which produce mosaic patterns in wide-weave fabric. Figure 4.3 show an exceptional resemblance to Bilibin's border work in Fig. 4.1, where both designs feature a stylized fowl, with highly similar treatment of the angular head, beak, and webbed feet.[41]

[41] Though there are conclusive ideas about the origins and spread of the motifs and silhouettes used in Slavic embroidery and folk arts, many argue the ornamental devices such as the bird as shown in figure 4.3 and modeled in 4.1 had lost its original symbolic significance after its development in very early times, and have been opportunities for folk artists to show their own artistry. See more in Hans Jürgen Hansen *European Folk Art in Europe and the Americas* (New York & Toronto: McGraw-Hill), 1968. 209/

Figure 4.1. Two figures looking toward the island of Buyan. *"The Tale of Tsar Saltan"* 1905. by Ivan Bilibin - Unknown source, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=459190

Figure 4.2 *A Merry Ride in a Mouse-drawn Carriage.* Copper engraving *lubok*, colored. 1820s or 1830s. *The Lubok* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers), 1984.

Figure 4.3 P.I. Povareshkina, towel border. Tver' Province, 1900s. Hilton, Alison. *Russian Folk Art.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 1995. 183.

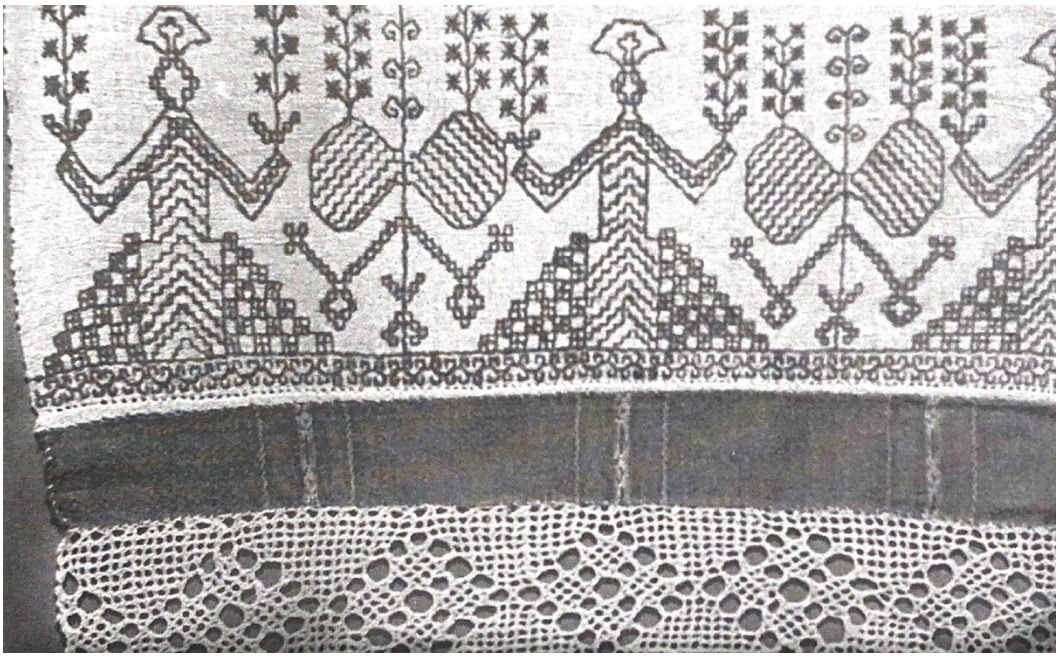


Figure 4.4 Towel border. Tver' Province, 19th century. Hilton, Alison. *Russian Folk Art.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 1995. 184.

Features of *lubki* are also present in the central image of Fig. 4.1 as well. The organic theme of undomesticated nature is reflected in the architecture of Buyan, home to a modest city with colorful rooftops. In other Russian folk tales, Buyan was known as home to the morning and evening stars, and represented one of many utopic sites, such as the mythical Kingdom of Opona and the underwater city of Kitezh, that lay tantalizingly beyond the borders of Russia proper. Buyan's architectural scheme resembles a bouquet of flowers viewed at a distance by the human figures in the foreground. The symbiosis between the natural and the manmade represented in the mirroring of the architectural to the organic yet again reveals the impact of *Art Nouveau* in Bilibin's work. The onion-domed roofs of Buyan precisely evoke those of Russian Orthodox churches, while their golden coloring recall both *lubki* graphics and the gold leaf used to adorn sacred icons. Not only does Bilibin pay tribute to these traditional artistic forms, but he

also represents native Russian religion in the triune composition of the scene. The Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity has been traditionally depicted with the Holy Spirit in shape of a dove, flying over the Father and Son, in the shape of a cross. In Bilibin's image, the three main objects of the illustration—the prince and queen to the sides, with the central island rising above the two—evoke the Christian trinity just as they would be depicted in an iconographic painting or *lubok.*

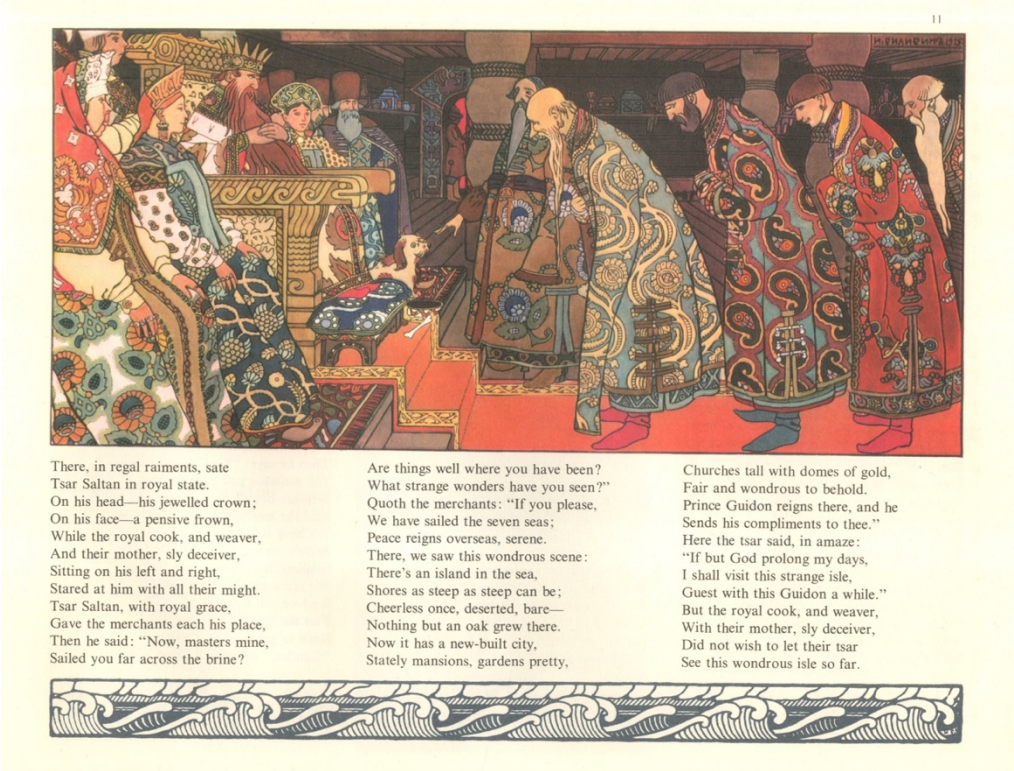
After arriving on Buyan, Gvidon, who had grown up inside of the barrel, goes hunting and rescues a swan from a bird of prey (a kite). To show its appreciation, the swan grants Gvidon a new city to rule over on the island as a duke, but Gvidon soon finds himself homesick and desires to visit the tsar's court once again. Hearing this request, the swan turns Gvidon into a mosquito, allowing him to fly across the sea and into the tsar's palace. There, he sees traveling merchants speaking to the tsar about the island of Buyan and its new duke, but notices that his two aunts and his grandmother were scheming against the tsar, once again, this time to prevent the reunion of the tsar with his wife and son. Gvidon stings his aunt in the eye and escapes. On returning to Buyan, he wishes to return to his father's court once again and the swan turns him into a fly. When reaching the court, Gvidon stings his other aunt in the eye as well and flies away. Again, when Gvidon returns to Buyan, he asks the swan to return to the tsar. This time, the swan turns Gvidon into a bumblebee, and Gvidon stings his grandmother in the nose and flies away.

An additional illustration one can examine in Bilibin's illuminated version of "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" is the piece envisioning the visit of the Tsar Saltan and his court by the traveling merchants (Fig. 4.5). This is the moment in the narrative in which the visitors inform the tsar of the mysterious island city of Buyan where, unbeknownst to the Tsar, his long-lost son now rules as duke. Bilibin fills the scene with painterly detail. Every item of textile adorning the figures of

the room are individually composed with an assortment of elaborate designs and hues. Bilibin pays close attention to both the main figures and objects in the background, such as the multicolored floral arch resembling the wood carvings of *teremok* architecture (see discussion in Chapter 2, section B).

The textile design in Bilibin's illustrations warrant comparison to the floral designs of William Morris, a British textile designer of the British Arts and Crafts Movement.[42] In Fig. 4.5, the eye-catching designs of the cloaks worn by the members of the tsar's court and the visiting merchants resemble Morris's impressive printed textile designs in their linear contours, floral motifs, and vibrant coloring (Fig. 4.6). In these designs, flowers once again evoke *Art Nouveau* and its fusion into Bilibin's Russian fairytale art, creating a novel Slavic visual identity. The innovation of printing technologies also enabled Bilibin to experiment with an extensive color palette beyond the simple, bold colors of the traditional *lubok* (Fig. 4.2), further contributing to the modernization of the Russian aesthetic.

[42] The Arts and Crafts Movement shared inspiration with the *Art Nouveau* movement and can be understood as a splinter group within the *Art Nouveau* genre. The group sought to develop a style influenced by local Romantic era creatives, such as the pre-Raphaelites in England, rather than the international sources of the *Art Nouveau* movement and its *Japonisme.*



There, in regal raiments, sate
Tsar Saltan in royal state.
On his head—his jewelled crown;
On his face—a pensive frown,
While the royal cook, and weaver,
And their mother, sly deceiver,
Sitting on his left and right,
Stared at him with all their might.
Tsar Saltan, with royal grace,
Gave the merchants each his place,
Then he said: "Now, masters mine,
Sailed you far across the brine?
Are things well where you have been?
What strange wonders have you seen?"
Quoth the merchants: "If you please,
We have sailed the seven seas;
Peace reigns overseas, serene.
There, we saw this wondrous scene:
There's an island in the sea,
Shores as steep as steep can be;
Cheerless once, deserted, bare—
Nothing but an oak grew there.
Now it has a new-built city,
Stately mansions, gardens pretty,
Churches tall with domes of gold,
Fair and wondrous to behold.
Prince Guidon reigns there, and he
Sends his compliments to thee."
Here the tsar said, in amaze:
"If but God prolong my days,
I shall visit this strange isle,
Guest with this Guidon a while."
But the royal cook, and weaver,
With their mother, sly deceiver,
Did not wish to let their tsar
See this wondrous isle so far.

Figure 4.5. Visitors to the Tsar's court from "The Tale of Tsar Saltan", Ivan Bilibin. 1905.

Figure 4.6.
William Morris. *Wandle.*1884

Additionally, Bilibin's "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" exhibits the impact of Eastern textiles. In fact, unlike certain features of *Art Nouveau,* which had been incorporated in Bilibin's fantasy worlds through the interpretation of the French movement's qualities and their modification through synthesis with Slavic visual elements, Bilibin precisely represents the textiles of imperial Russian empire in his fairytale settings.

After defeating his scheming aunts and grandmother, Gvidon returns from his father's court asks the swan for a bride, a princess from a distant land renowned for her beauty. The swan reveals herself as that very princess, and the two are happily married. On hearing of Duke Gvidon and his new wife, the tsar travels to Buyan, where he is reunited at last with his wife and son.

The final scene of "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" is the celebratory feast of Tsar Saltan and his family, shown in Fig. 4.7. This image also portrays heavily ornamented garments structured similarly to traditional Slavic garb. Beneath the illustration, the border features a symmetrical pattern evocative of those embroidered in Russian folk fabrics. The most distinctive feature of this frame, however, is the two-toned carpet spreads across most of the image. Here again we see a floral pattern, but unlike the intricate, flowing designs on the garments, the carpet more closely resembles the geometric forms of carpets crafted in the outlying regions of the Russian empire, in central and western Asia. A representative example is shown in Fig. 4.8, a traditional nineteenth century Chodor carpet woven in Russian Turkestan. Although not a precise replica of central Asian rugs, the carpet Bilibin imagines in "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" follows a diagonal

grid pattern similar to the classic *ertmen-guls* pattern, indicating the integration of non-Slavic traditions as a show of an expanded Russian culture.[43]

Figure 4.7. Ivan Bilibin. The Tsar's celebration of Gvidon's return in "The Tale of Tsar Saltan",1905.

[43] See Elena Tzareva, *Rugs & Carpets from Central Asia: the Russian Collection,* (Allen Lane//Penguin Books: Leningrad,1984). 23, 164. The *Chodor* also referred to as the *chodor göl,* the main tribal *göl* of the Chodor Turkomans.

Figure 4.8. A traditional Chodor carpet from 19th century Turkestan.[44]

A final indicator of the influence of *Art Nouveau* on Bilibin's works can be observed in the scene depicting the barrel sheltering young Gvidon and his mother being tossed about in the sea before they arrive on Buyan (Fig. 4.9). Many viewers will recognize the watercolor graphic, not from the Russian fairytale, but from the Japanese woodblock print that inspired it, Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa,* (Fig. 4.9). The vivid naturalism of Japanese art, and thus *Japonisme* and the *Art Nouveau* movement is translated directly into Bilibin's watercolors, as he evokes the dynamic movement of the Hokusai print, which relies on lines and

[44] "Rugs and Carpets: Russia - Turkestan - Chodor carpet." *Bridgeman Images: DeAgostini Library*, edited by Bridgeman Images, 1st edition, 2014. *Credo Reference* retrieved from http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bridgemandeag/rugs_and_carpets_russia_turkestan_chodor_carpet/0?institutionId=4864. Accessed 08 Mar. 2020.

composition.[45] Although Bilibin used a different process in creating the crashing waves of this scene, his brushwork clearly emulates the linear qualities of the original in their uniform weight, fluidity, and grace. But Bilibin's illustration is not solely rooted in *Art Nouveau*, as it includes a *lubok*-inspired border beneath the tempestuous sea, with bold, symmetric motifs resembling those of traditional Russian folk cross-stitch. Thus, Bilibin integrates elements from both Japanese woodblock prints and Russian *lubki*. Bilibin's decision to frame a distinctive *Art Nouveau* piece via *Japonisme* with the archetypal motif of Russian folk culture achieves a complementary contrast between Western and Eastern aesthetic spheres.

Figure 4.9. Ivan Bilibin. *The Barrel Floats Across the Sea…* in "The Tale of Tsar Saltan", 1905. - http://www.raruss.ru/russe-moderne/2796-bilibin-saltan.html, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57822428

[45] Bilibin's fascination with Japanese woodblock print is recorded back to his days in art school, as one of his disciples R. R. O'Connell-Mikhailovskaia wrote that "I.Ia. [Bilibin] often brought engravings to the art school. He showed us Japanese woodblock prints by… Hokusai" which manifested itself in his fairytale illustrations. See more in Elena Diakonova "Ivan Bilibin and Georgii Narbut" in *Japan and Russia: Three centuries of Mutual Images*, Global Oriental, 2008. 40.

Figure 4.10. Katsushika Hokusai. *Great Wave off Kanagawa,* 1831- 1833. Restored version of File:.jpg (rotated and cropped, dirt, stains, and smudges removed. Creases corrected. Histogram adjusted and color balanced.), Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5576388

The distinctive features of Ivan Bilibin's images of "The Tale of Tsar Saltan", derived from *Art Nouveau* and folk art, reflect a shift in artistic hierarchy similar to the one explored through the tale as literature during Pushkin's era of the Golden Age. The refinement of the *Art Nouveau* style paired with less overtly sophisticated approaches reflect the Russian cultural and political environment of the day, yielding an aesthetic inimitable by any other artistic atmosphere than fin de siècle imperial Russia. With Bilibin's exploration of folk art as a tradition and style on a par with the globally widespread one of *Art Nouveau,* the order of artistic value is disrupted, redefining what constitutes fine art. Through the introduction of works such as Bilibin's which embrace ambiguities, art is no longer located solely in western Europe with its established conventions, nor in traditional practices, but in the space between.

Chapter 5

Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, and departure from *Art Nouveau*

"Now I feel drawn to the East and would

very much like to work in its spirit…"

- I. Ia. Bilibin[46]

5.1 – "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" and Orientalist interpretations of Russia

After dedicating some time to the study of traditions and practices of his native northern Russia, Bilibin shifted his focus southward. Although he had shown an interest in the studies of various cultures, as reflected in his research into the Russian north and Siberian regions and numerous ventures to rural areas at the request of the ethnographic department of the Russian Museum, his studies initially extended only to ethnically Slav territories.[47] As his artistic career developed, however, Bilibin began to evince interest in the romance and mystery that lay beyond the borders of Slavic Russia. This curiosity began to show in his works, as his illustrations became more stylized in ways that varied significantly from his previous works. "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" is one such work, in which Bilibin's exploration of the southern Russian empire and beyond is visually manifested, further problematizing the application of Orientalism and internal Orientalism as narrative and aesthetic devices.

"The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" is revolves around Dadon, the tsar of an unnamed kingdom. A once fierce and ruthless ruler in his youth, the tsar has grown old and wishes to live

[46] From Bilibin's letters to S. Zimin, 1913. See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 190.

[47] See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 184.

out his final days as sovereign in peace. However, his desire for harmony was constantly threatened by the dangers posed by foreign armies that attempted to invade the tsar's realm, necessitating the maintenance of a large army to protect his domain. The tsar, who could no longer bear the strain of these external threats, wept and lay sleepless until a sage entered his court and presented the tsar with a magical golden cockerel. The mysterious oracle told the tsar he need fret no more, for if he places the golden cockerel atop a spire, the bird will guard the kingdom. During times of peace, the cockerel will sit in silence, and only when there is a risk of war will it cry out to warn the tsar and his army of the impending menace. The tsar, eager to receive the item, promises the sage anything he wishes in return. Following the sage's instructions, the tsar had the cockerel installed atop a spire, where it sat silently for years.

After this period of peace, the tsar one day hears the piercing cry of the golden bird warning of approaching danger. Hearing this, the tsar gathers up a large army led by his eldest son and sends them in the direction from which the cockerel warned the threat would come. For eight days the tsar received no word from the army, when once again, the cockerel cried to signal danger approaching. The tsar gathered another force led by his second son, sending them in search of the first. After another eight days pass with no word from either army, the cockerel calls out a third time. This time, the tsar himself leads an army to search for his two sons and their armies. After a week and a day's travel, Dadon comes across a camp where he finds his two sons lying on the ground, slain. As the tsar weeps over the loss of his sons, a mysterious maiden, Tsarina of Shamakhan, appears from within a tent. The tsar, enthralled by her beauty, forgets his murdered sons as the tsarina leads him into the tent where the two spend the night. When morning arrives, the bewitched Tsar Dadon leads his host and the tsarina back to his kingdom, where he is met by a cheering crowd. Among the crowd was the sage and seer, who had come to

claim his reward. The sage requests the Tsarina of Shamakhan, but the tsar refuses his request. When the sage persists, Tsar Dadon grows infuriated and strikes the sage with his staff, killing him. The tsarina laughs gleefully as she watches, and the golden cockerel flies down from the spire to peck the tsar's head, killing him as well. At this, the mysterious maiden vanishes, and the narrator reminds the audience of the moral of the tale.

Pushkin's final fairytale in verse, "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" (1834), follows themes canonical to the genre. First, there is the tripling of elements, a popular trope in the Russian folk tradition, as also seen in "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" in the form of a "three brothers" tales, and in the number of sisters in "Vasilisa the Beautiful." "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" is set in a mysterious "thrice-nine realm", and the tsar and his two sons lead three fateful expeditions in response to the golden cockerel's cries, paralleling Gvidon's three visits to the Tsar's court in "The Tale of Tsar Saltan." The conventional narrative elements, including the concluding moral lesson, highlight the essential Russian character of Pushkin's tale.

While its Russian-ness is undeniable, there are also elements that distinguish this tale from others examined here. While "The Tsar Saltan," makes use of expressions hinting at a magical but Slavic setting, the language used in "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" suggests the influence of a culture outside of northwestern Russia. Although the setting in a mysterious, yet familiar, land is a common thread through much folklore, "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" is distinct in how this ambiguity functions in ways that it had not in previous works. Bilibin evokes internal Orientalism in his work by combining the overt Russian-ness evoked by folkloric and visual conventions with subtler references to possible non-Slavic settings, blurring the line for viewers between Russian and non-Russian motifs. When describing the sage, Pushkin mentions

him wearing a white "turban," headwear commonly associated with western Asia, especially among non-Christian peoples. This visual cue is also present in Bilibin's rendering of the fairytale, in which the mysterious visitor's head is covered in long white fabric, as he bows to Tsar Dadon, enchanted gift in hand (Fig. 5.1). This Orientalist element which is literally present within Pushkin's fairytale world is reflected in Bilibin's imagining of the fabulous, yet identifiably Russian, world as well, highlighting how Bilibin's work reflected Orientalist themes, and more specifically, themes that could be called *self*-Orientalism.

In Bilibin's artistic phase following the syncretism of *Art Nouveau* elements and folk-art techniques, the *fin de siècle* artist began to move away from the *Art Nouveau* vision he had embraced so strongly in earlier works. Although he did not abandon western artistic ideals in his new creative phase, Bilibin looked to the East rather than the West, working within a third sphere between these two cultural modes. Simultaneous to his adaptation of new, Oriental stimuli, Bilibin also engaged in internal reflection on imperial Russia and its cultural practices in relation to the Orient and their ethnic customs. This self-assessment is echoed in the images Bilibin created for Alexander Pushkin's "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel," complicating the already insubstantial social boundary between East and West. His illustrations also highlight the reality of the Russian aesthetic identity, which involved essential features from Oriental and Occidental spheres of influence that were considered paradoxical.

The Russian perspective of the "Orient" as the outsider, as illuminated by Pushkin through the exotification of the turban as an ornament associated with a mysterious figure with an enchanted weathercock, is also achieved by Bilibin through visual suggestions. Modifications to Bilibin's graphic style can be noted in the rendering of the figures in the 1907 illustrations. Figure 5.1, which depicts the scene in which the sage appears to the weary Tsar Dadon seated on

a throne to the right with an enchanted golden cockerel, exhibits a manner of grotesquerie, with unnaturally emphasized and distorted features.[48] The intentional distortions and exaggerations are especially present in the facial features of the subjects. While the intention appears to be satirical when observing the portrayal of Tsar Dadon, who appears to be depicted as an artistic interpretation of Pushkin's social satire, the accentuation of the sage's features functions as a signifier of the strange visitor's non-Slavic origins. The sage's profile, with its particularly prominent nose, along with a complexion darker than the rest of the court brings attention to his ethnic otherness. The striking differences between the people depicted emphasizes the impression of the alterity of the tsar's visitor. The sage's features, which are stereotypic characteristics often attributed to ethnic groups in west and south Asia are visually linked to the identity of the Oriental "Other". Still, the fascinating aspect of Bilibin's Orientalism is in the idea that a magical, Oriental sage could exist within a positively Russian folk world, indicating that though they are still the Other, their presence in the greater empire was beginning to have an impact on Russian self-conceptions of identity.

A compositional variation stemming from Orientalism is also noticeable in Bilibin's illuminations in "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel," as well. Prior to his work on "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel," many of Bilibin's illustrations were composed as a still, transient image, created by selecting and freezing a single frame from a sequence of moments. Illustrations from the twentieth-century picture book, such as shown in Fig 5.2, which depicts the procession of the tsar and his army in search for his two sons, exhibits a rhythmicity reminiscent of some East Asian paintings.

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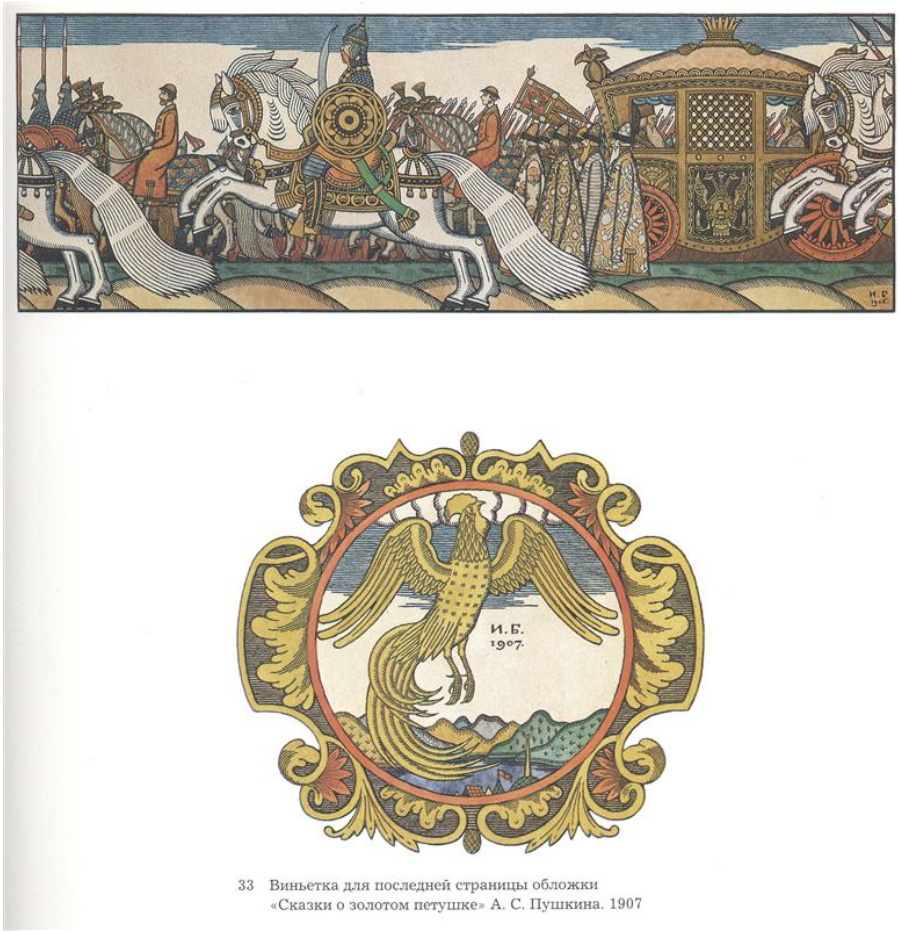
[48] See Alla Rosenfeld, "The Search for National Identity in Turn-of-the-Century Russian Graphic Design," *Defining Russian Graphic Arts: From Diaghilev to Stalin, 1898- 1934.* Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1999. 30. Rosenfeld refers to the depiction of Tsar Dadon as "satirical grotesquerie."

Figure 5.1 Ivan Bilibin. The sage bestowing the Golden Cockerel onto Tsar Dadon, from *"The Tale of the Golden Cockerel",* 1907. - http://book-graphics.blogspot.ru/2014/02/skazka-o-zolotom-petouchke.html, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=51454616

In this figure, there appears to be a linear progression made by the figures from the right toward the left side of the image, implying a movement of time and objects within the space of a single page (the implied movement illuminated here is not to be confused with the visual "movement" of line discussed in chapter III, which is an aesthetic element of the *Art Nouveau* movement). The watercolor's shift to pictorially representing a sequence of events in a single frame by guiding the audience's eye to read the events horizontally was a technique notably used in East Asian scroll paintings, which can be read either horizontally or vertically. While the technique is not as pronounced as in Asian canvases, the shift to a horizontal reading of events shows the effect of Asian artistic techniques on Bilibin's illustrations of this period. *Lubki* also utilized similar narrative techniques, although less prominently, in which short plots were constrained to

a single frame. The "*lubok* – like" style manifests itself in the horses pictured in figure 5.2 as well, which presents posing styles lifted from the *lubok* as well.[49] Hence, even in methods used to recount narratives was there an intermingling of western and eastern traditions.



33 Виньетка для последней страницы обложки «Сказки о золотом петушке» А. С. Пушкина. 1907

Figure 5.2. Ivan Bilibin. The Tsar's procession in "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel", 1907.

Figure 5.3, depicting the deadly reencounter of Tsar Dadon and the mysterious sage is another image from Bilibin's "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" that recalls the graphic qualities of Russian popular prints, or *lubok*. Unlike in previous *lubok* inspired pieces by Bilibin examined

[49] See José Alaniz, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia* (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson) 2010. 26.

in chapters 3 and 4, Fig. 5.3 takes a different route in reimagining the popular folk graphics. In "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel," Bilibin stays closer to the authentic look of the printed pieces, discarding the extravagant look of the *Art Nouveau* movement that was presented in his earlier works. The background of Fig. 5.3 is left primarily untouched, leaving all illustrative work to be done by the figures in the middle-ground and foregrounds. Figure 5.3 in comparison to a nineteenth century lithographic *lubok* shown as Fig. 5.4, follows the same general rules such as the subjects in the foreground framing the middle-ground, which appoints the setting of the scene. The celestial decoration hovering over the interacting subjects in figure 5.3 is highly reminiscent of the divine upper realm depicted in the iconographical *lubok* (figure 5.4) as well, emphasizing even further the strong impression *lubki* made on Bilibin and his works. I also argue that in the context of Bilibin's "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel", the reversal back to the authentic form of *lubki* accomplished along with the heavily Orientalized imagery of the fairytale narrative simultaneously summons a Romantic nationalism, while also internally Orientalizing the very people who engaged in the original art of *lubok.* While these images are unmistakable in their Russianness, the incorporation of unambiguously non-Slavic cultures into long-held Slavic printing and folktale traditions.

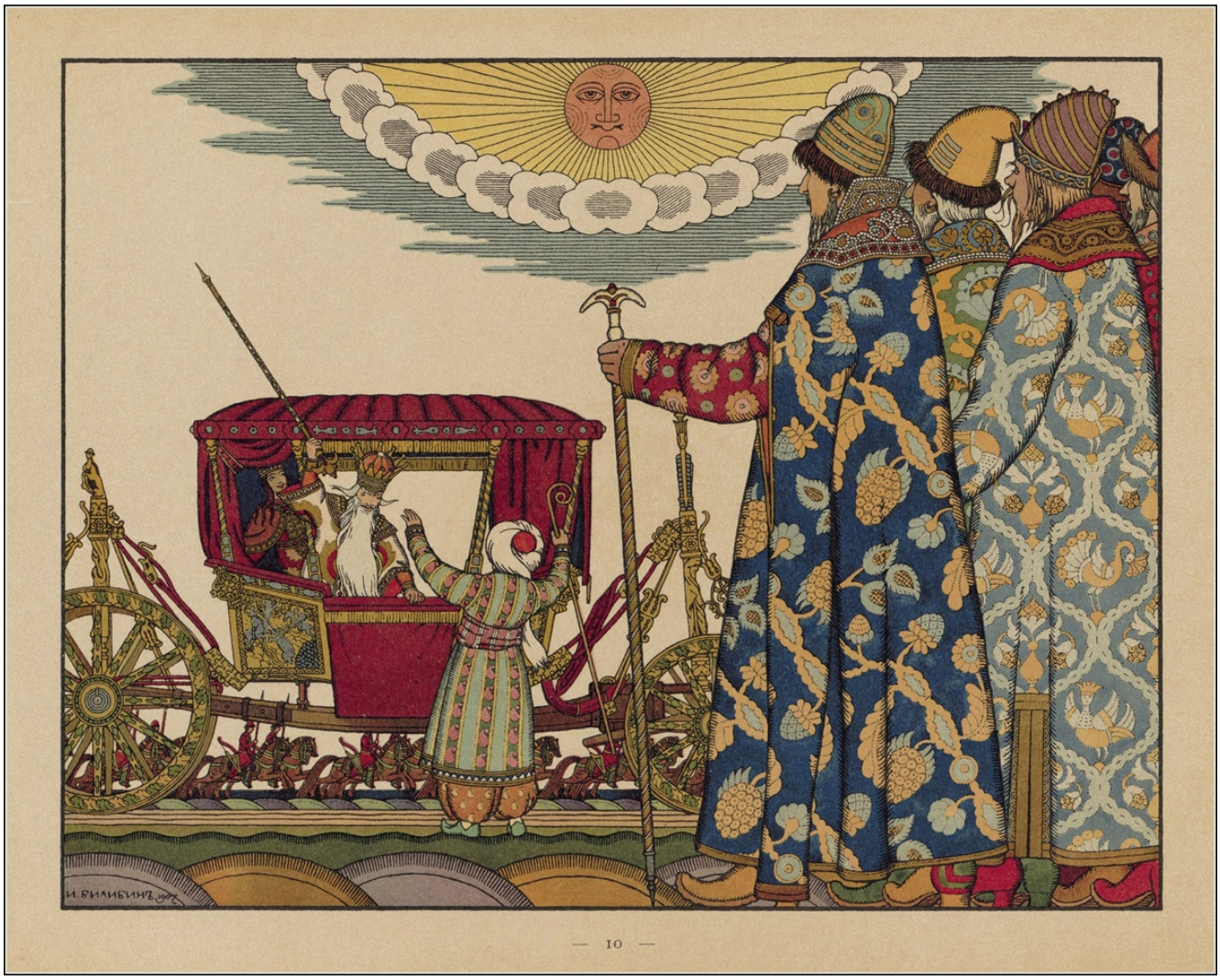


Figure 5.3 Ivan Bilibin, Tsar Dadon striking down on the sage in “The Tale of the Golden Cockerel”, 1907. http://book-graphics.blogspot.ru/2014/02/skazka-o-zolotom-petouchke.html, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=51454627

Figure 5.4 “Sts Vasily and Maxim”, copper engraving *lubok,* 1820s or 1830s. From *The Lubok* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers), 1984.

Orientalism as a theoretical construct functions out of the misunderstanding and mystification of the Orient, but another major factor prevalent in the discussion of Orientalism is the romanticizing of the Other. Such romanticizing comes in various forms (such as the *pugachev* peasant), the feminization and even eroticization being one such example. The Tsarina Shamakhan who appears before Tsar Dadon in “The Tale of the Golden Cockerel” embodies the idea of Orientalizing through exotification of the female figure, especially of non-European female bodies. Figure 5.5 shows Tsarina Shamakhan emerging from her tent after the Tsar entered in search for his two lost sons. Despite having just discovered the corpses of his sons, the tale describes the Tsarina as so alluring that she distracts the Tsar from the tragedy of their

deaths. The Tsar's captivation by the mysterious female figure is apparent in the illustration, as he stares in awe at the tsarina. Pushkin's original text does not describe any of the tsarina's physical characteristics (unlike in the case of the magical turbaned sage), but Bilibin takes artistic initiative in imagining this enigmatic figure. Although the young woman appears to be fair-skinned, she is dressed in garments unlike those worn in the ethnically Slavic regions of the Russian empire. Rather, her attire resembles those found in the newly incorporated regions of the Russian south, home to multitudes of Asiatic nations. By maintaining physical qualities of the Slavic race while presenting her as an exotic being, Bilibin constructs a romanticized vision of an seemingly benign, even appealing, Orient. The differences presented are stark when comparing the presentation of the tsarina with the brown-skinned and turbaned sage, perhaps reflecting Russian anxieties toward the Islamic Ottoman empire. Unease over the Orient nonetheless seeps into the finale of the fairytale even despite its romanticized image, as the Tsarina vanishes after the Tsar meets his fate.

Bilibin's presentation of Tsarina Shamakhan is suggestive of ethnographic illustrations that were popular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well, at a time when artists began to illustrate and document diverse populations during an era of rapid empire building in Europe. Figure 5.6, an ethnographic drawing of the people of Baku, Azerbaijan drafted by French artist Jean-Pierre Moynet (1860) show similarities in to Bilibin's rendition of Tsarina Shamakhan. Although details in design and construction may be altered for the imaginative purposes of a fairytale world, the ethnographical features of the image clearly show a consciousness of societies that were beginning to integrate into Russian culture. Bilibin himself was no stranger to ethnographic studies, as he travelled throughout the northern regions of the

Russian empire to detail the lives of rural Russian peasants, which was foreign in many ways to the urban and wealthy sector of the Russian population, including Bilibin himself.

Figure 5.5 Ivan Bilibin, Tsar Dadon's encounter with Princess Shamakhan in "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel". 1907. - http://book-graphics.blogspot.ru/2014/02/skazka-o-zolotom-petouchke.html, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=51454623

Figure 5.6. Jean-Pierre Moynet, Costumes of Baku in *Le Tour du Monde*, volume 1 [1], 1860. Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=74299684

Bilibin's "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" functions in some ways as an ethnographic documentation of Oriental Russia, a new, yet old, identity that the empire was struggling to come to terms with. The inclusion of Orientalized features in the Russian folktale was not merely a creative decision intended to depict a more fantastic imaginary realm, but also a reaction to the realization of Russian as a third space standing uncertainly astride East and West. By accepting that the Other was now part of Russia, Russia came to understand that it was now part of the Other as well. Bilibin's illustrations reflect this ambiguous identity, as well as the uncertainties felt by Russians in their own identity arising from their complex cultural position.

Chapter 6

Bilibin's Contemporaries

6.1 – Outside of the Slavic Empire: Aubrey Beardsley

Though Ivan Bilibin's visual style was unique to him and his brushwork, across the European continent were various other artists undertook similar creative approaches combining new and old, foreign and domestic, modern and traditional into an innovative visual style. This trend is unsurprising when considering the ascendance of the *Art Nouveau* movement and the influence it held over the creative sphere of the modern global west, which itself derived from the integration of opposing looks and philosophies.

Great Britain and its several *Art Nouveau* inspired offshoots laid the foundation for the emergence of a generation of artists seeking to invent a contemporary style fitting to the *Art Nouveau* fashion of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, without abandoning a certain British look – just as Bilibin as attempting to do with his latest Russian style. An early and very recognizable example of an artist taking part in this effort is the English illustrator Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley, known for his extravagant black ink line work as well as his decadent and many times macabre themes incorporated early qualities of the *Art Nouveau* movement, more specifically of those of the Aestheticism movement. Aestheticism was a movement of the late nineteenth century that concentrated on the argument of *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art's sake"), putting forward the autonomy of artistic standards rather than fixating on any kind of political, moral or utilitarian purposes. Just as it were for Ivan Bilibin and his illustrations the introduction of

Japanese art, specifically the Japanese woodblock prints, proved extremely significant to artists like Beardsley, who continued to find inspiration from the East Asian print style throughout his artistic career. The similarity of Bilibin and Beardsley's works are most reflected in their highly detailed line work, both displaying the Russian and English artists' interest in *Japonisme* and the *ukiyo-e* print.

Both Ivan Bilibin's 1900 imagining of the *Baba Yaga* in his illustrated version of "Vasilisa the Beautiful" (Fig. 6.1) and Beardsley's illustration *Venus Between Terminal Gods* (Fig. 6.2) exhibit the impact of the Japanese's influence well. Both illustrated pieces embody the heightened two-dimensionality of woodblock prints where depth, if there is any at all, is separated into simplified layers of a foreground (most likely the central figure), and a background framing the context of the subject either geographically or for design. Compositionally, the two images below parallel each other in a print like fashion as well – there is a distinguishable figure standing in the center of the frame, enveloped by a lush natural scene rendered using an assortment of organic, free moving lines. The line weight remains virtually consistent throughout both of the illustrations, relying on movement and space to narrate the two moments. Very clearly visible with these images (Figs. 6.1 and 6.2) are the different artistic choices made by their creators during their rendering as well. First and foremost, choice in the color palette is an apparent difference Bilibin and Beardsley made when creating their works. Although both illustrators worked with ink as one of their primary media, Bilibin relies heavily on water-based paints to fill in

Figure 6.1. Ivan Bilibin. *Baba Yaga* with her mortar and pestle in "Vasilisa the Beautiful", 1899-1900. Self-scanned, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15092

Figure 6.2. Aubrey Beardsley. *Venus between Terminal Gods,* 1895. www.artrenewal.org, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22852291

the forms he creates on the surface beforehand. It can be assessed from not only this image of *Baba Yaga,* but also through the rest of Bilibin's portfolio that color played a significant role in conveying not only the story and the mood of the fairytale but its specific ties to Russian and Slavic folk culture. It is evident that Bilibin was keenly aware of the importance of including a specific color palette reflecting the equally colorful look of traditional Russian artistic practice. Beardsley, on the other hand, remains committed to black ink as his drawing method. Beardsley illustrations are easily recognizable for their highly contrasted black and white images, which not only is tonally striking but also accentuates the artist's uncommon choices in theme.

Another major factor that distinguishes the two artists' works is the subject matter chosen to be visually narrated. As discussed in the earlier chapters, Ivan Bilibin specifically selected fairytales and folktales passed down through the common Russian people to emphasize a Russian quality in his works, as seen in his interpretations of "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf" or "Tsar Saltan" to give a few examples. Bilibin's unique, modern Russianness is accomplished through visualizing figures who are unquestionably Russian and known by the Russian people with touches of Japanese graphic methods. Though it was foreign influence, the Russian artist coopted Japanese art as an added instrument in giving his illustrations their deeply Russian identity. This practice is different for Beardsley, who unlike Bilibin, did not adopt methods calling attention to his English heritage and its artistic traditions. Rather than contrasting imported visual technique with local subject matters, Beardsley draws influence from Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints – more specifically those of Japanese *shunga* for not only style but themes of eroticism.[50] Figure 6.2 subtly hints at the erotic, with two phallic statues with cornucopia suspended above placed to the sides of a crowned feminine figure, suggesting at

[50] S*hunga* is typically a form of *ukiyo-e* woodblock print, often depicting sexually explicit imagery (although some pieces predating the woodblock technique are known).

fertility and reproduction.[51] As one can see, this is vastly different from the subject matters Bilibin dealt with.[52]

Beardsley's signature style of merging the erotic and the grotesque is a direct product of *Japonisme,* just as Bilibin's modern Russian style was. Despite having the same sources of inspiration, Bilibin and Beardsley proceeded down vastly separate artistic paths, though still maintaining similar graphic styles that allow their pieces to be read simultaneously similarly and differently.

6.2 – Within the Slavic Lens: Alphonse Mucha and the *Slav Epic*

Among Ivan Bilibin's contemporaries were also those who worked toward a very similar goal of creating art that embodies the spirit and character of the Slavic peoples like the St. Petersburg artist. Alphonse Mucha, a Czech painter, and illustrator who also produced work throughout the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century created a similar portfolio as Bilibin. Mucha, though classically trained and skilled in painting is best known as the graphic artist who produced some of the most recognizable *Art Nouveau* era commercial illustrations which now, is safe to say, characterize the fin-de-siècle print culture. His illustrations regularly featured a central female figure donning elegant and fluid dresses, as well as flowing hair, resembling a goddess-like figure. Once again, the line qualities of these illustrations and posters produced by Mucha are reminiscent of those seen in Bilibin's works, exhibiting the wide scope of impact Japanese woodblock print had on modern European artistic culture.

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[51] For more details see Linda Gertner Zatlin Chapter 4 "The Grotesque" in *Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1997. 212.

[52] Unlike Bilibin's works, Beardsley's illustrations manifest the characteristics of the "Decadent Style", a style deriving itself from not only the *Art nouveau* movement but also Romanticism. See details in John Robert Reed *Decadent Syle* (Athens: Ohio Univeristy Press), 1985. 11, 164.

What I'd like to focus on comparing with Bilibin, however, is not on Mucha's iconic Bernhardt posters but the selection of large-scale murals the artist completed toward the end of his life, titled the *Slav Epic*. The *Slav Epic*, which was realized throughout the eighteen years of 1910 to 1928, consisted of twenty mural paintings completed in egg tempera paint. The string of paintings narrated the grand mythology of the origins of the Slavic peoples, including their struggles and overcoming them as symbolically unified people. While Bilibin and Mucha both strived to place Russian, Czech and or the entirety of the Slavic tradition into the consciousness of their audiences, the two artists bring about varying results through their Slavic themed works. For Bilibin, the goal is to place the Russian presence into the international artistic map as a recognized and independent creative culture just as much as that of Western European artistic academia. He does so by featuring motifs and themes explicitly tied to the traditional culture found specifically in Russia through fairytales, a choice he made due to the easy accessibility and likelihood of familiarity by the majority of the population as something uniquely of their own. Bilibin's decisions to study and recreate folk stories also allows his works to develop into art created *for* the Russian people, rather than art depicting culturally Russian images yet being directed at an outside audience.

Alphonse Mucha's work is significantly unalike Bilibin's. While just like his Russian counterpart, Mucha focuses on a nationalistic goal of calling attention to Czech as well as Slavic peoples, his Pan Slavic ambition of uniting a variety of ethnicities calls for a broader audience than Bilibin's strictly Russian assertion. The widening of scope, as well as Mucha's career as a western European artist (despite his Czech origin, Prague was very much integrated into the western European cultural sphere unlike the Russian empire), appears to shift the resulting audience of the pieces. Mucha's execution of the piece through classical western technique

heavily relying on realism and chiaroscuro expands the gap between his intended audience, the Slavic people, and present the pieces unconsciously as one created for the consumption of a western audience. In a way, this gap appears to even slightly Orientalize the very own subjects Mucha endeavors to represent, as the use of artistic language created for the west inadvertently others the depicted non-Western European people. The mythologizing of the Slavic origin which is emphasized in pieces like *Der Heilige Berg Athos* and *Apotheosis of the Slavs* (figure 6.3 and 6.4) arguably mystifies the identity and experiences of Eastern European people, as he opts out from accentuating any kind of traditional, everyday motif but incorporates elements of grander spiritualism through divine figures and an otherworldly mood.[53]

Bilibin, who presents his subjects in an artistic form that is recognizable to the lives of ordinary people, avoids this. Though the effect of Orientalism and otherness is still significant in Bilibin's works, it functions differently than that found in Mucha's murals in which it reads as an outsider looking in and casting Slavic people in a certain light, rather than an outsider looking in onto how a Russian might present themselves. Bilibin's technique allows his works to not only exist in the international context of art but also to declare the existence of Russian culture through an un-imposed Russian lens that hasn't been influenced by west European imagination.

[53] While I. Ia. Bilibin dealt with issues of Slavophilism, Alphonse Mucha's *Slav Epic* paintings are marked with Pan-Slavic aspirations of incorporating all Slavic cultures as a united body. For a more detailed discussion distinguishing Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism, see Jelena Milojković-Djurić *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and the Balkans: 1830- 1880: Images of the Self and Others* (New York: Columbia University Press.), 1994. 24.

Figure 6.3. Alphonse Mucha. *Der Heilige Berg Athos* ("Holy Mount Athos"), 1926. Mucha Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Tempera on Canvas. Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8879548

Figure 6.4. Alphonse Mucha . *Apotheosis of the Slavs,* 1925. Private Collection. Tempera on Canvas. http://www.reflex.cz/galerie/kultura/10414/?foto=12, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=25199337

Chapter 7

Conclusion

"Instead of putting all my efforts into the cultural life of another country I would like to work for my homeland"

- I. Ia. Bilibin[54]

7.1 – Pioneering the Russian decorative arts

After publishing his illustrative interpretation of Alexander Pushkin's "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel" in 1907, Ivan Bilibin began his next project revolving around the illustration of Russian fairytale books in 1908 by working on illustrations for "The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish", another tale by Pushkin. The project, which was unfortunately never completed or published (he eventually restarted the project in 1933, which was then published in French under the title *Conte du petit poisson d'or*), marked the beginning of a long hiatus in his creation of Russian fairytale books narrating magical children's stories as he began to work with various theater production companies. In the winter of 1907, Bilibin involved himself in his first theatrical production, designing stage-sets and costumes for the play *Le Miracle de Théophile* by Rutebeuf at the Sanin Theatre. Following this endeavor Bilibin continues to engage with various other theatrical productions— the artist's unique style and techniques which were previously reserved for a two-dimensional and static canvas were now being applied elsewhere, helping to create playful and animated musical productions. The following year in 1908, Bilibin goes on to

[54] From Bilibin's letter to I. Brodsky, April 1935. See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 204.

design the stage-set and costumes for the opera *The Golden Cockerel,* which premiered in 1909, his second time working with a reinterpretation of the Pushkin tale, produced by Pyotr Olenin. Despite Bilibin's temporary move away from two-dimensional art and into the three-dimensional, it is clear when viewing the drafted sketches that Bilibin applied similar principles to his theatrical designs as he did his book illustrations. As exhibited in Fig. 7.1, Bilibin's sets were created with the same attention to detail to the dramatis personae and surrounding scenery, emphasized with vivid colors and striking linework. Though as we saw, its effectiveness is certain in his book illustrations, some individuals, such as Bilibin's colleague Sergei Diaghilev witnessed the explicit transferal of Bilibin's artistic style into the practice of spatial design as misdirected.[55] For this reason, Diaghilev did not invite Bilibin to design for the Ballet Russe after the 1909 production.[56]

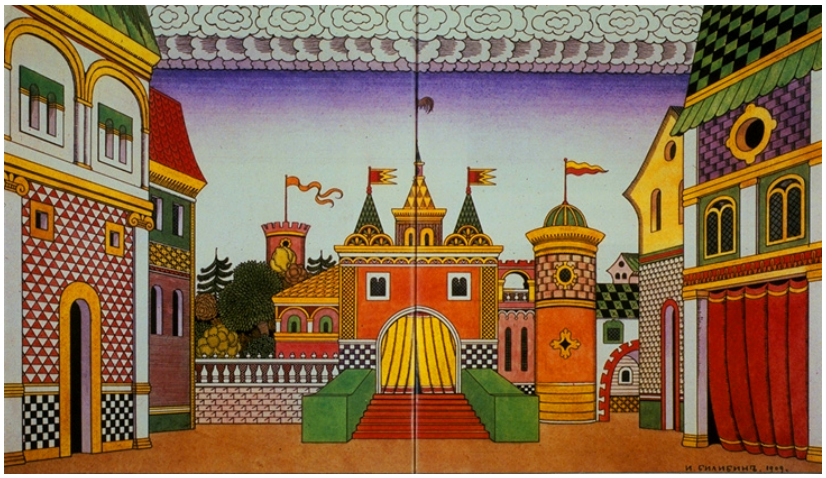

Figure 7.1. Bilibin's stage design for Act 2: The Tsardom of Tsar Dadon, Town Square in the opera *The Golden Cockerel,* by Rimsky-Korsakov, 1909. Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=459179

[55] Sergei Pavlovich Diaghilev was part of the *World of Art* publication as its editor,and contributed greatly to the journal by connecting it group to sponsors such as Princess Mariia Tenisheva, who bankrolled the publication. Apart from his role in the *World of Art,* he was also a reknowned art critic and writer. See more details in Aleksandr A. Kamenskii *The World of Art Movement in Early 20th-Century Russia* (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publ.), 1991. 203.

[56] See John E. Bowlt, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the "World of Art Group"*, 1979. 244.

Unlike Diaghilev, some audiences still found Bilibin's theatrical designs to be successful, and the artist continued to involve engross himself in a variety of additional space art projects. In 1920, Bilibin relocated to Cairo, Egypt in order to study the exotic lands outside of the European influence that he was accustomed to, possibly as an extension of his interest in the Orient, as discussed in chapter 5 in relation to his illustrations for Pushkin's "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel." Once settled in Cairo, where he lived for five years until his relocation to Paris in 1925, Bilibin focused on studying the culture and art of the ancient Greeks and Byzantine.[57] Bilibin wrote to a Parisian correspondent from his studio in Cairo that there were two Egypts: "an ancient, classical Egypt, and Moslem Egypt."[58] What he found once arriving in the African city was that he took to neither versions of Egypt, as his expectations of a magnificent and exotic city was broken down, demonstrating that Bilibin was indeed a working part of the European establishment instituting Orientalist ideas that were so prevalent in some of his late 1900s illustrations, despite his simultaneous role as the Orientalized outsider by existing as a Russian in a culture dominated by the authority of the West.

Years later, in 1931, Ivan Bilibin began a project designing the set and costumes for the ballet *The Firebird* by Igor Stravinsky, which was staged by Michel Fokine, and set to premier in Buenos Aires. *The Firebird* is a ballet production based on the Russian folktale "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf." one of the first fairytales Bilibin illustrated in his career as mentioned in chapter 3 of this thesis.[59] Though based on the same tale, in the 1931 interpretation

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[57] In 1922, Bilibin left Cairo for Paris, where he began earning a living by decorating private mansions, as well as Orthodox churches. See Robert Chandler et al. *Russian Magic Tales from Pushkin to Platonov* (London: Penguin Classics), 2012.

[58] From Bilibin's letter to a Parisian correspondent, 1921. See Sergei Golynets, *Ivan Bilibin*. (London and Sidney: Pan Books, 1981). 197.

[59] For a detailed discussion on the significant of *The Firebird* in the *Ballet Russe* as well as Russian artistic culture see Sally Banes chapter 6 "Firebird and the Idea of Russianness" in Lynn Garafola and Nancy Van Norman Baer *The Ballet Russees and its World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1999.

of the story, Bilibin's style changed considerably, appearing to have progressed in its abandonment of the *Art Nouveau* style that was so prominent in his 1899 version of the folktale. Bilibin's revision of the tale was appropriate to its time with elements of the emerging new style of Art Deco appearing to be embraced. This shift in style is exemplified in Fig.8.2, which depict Bilibin's costume design for the character Koschei the Deathless, by the use of strong geometric lines, which were influenced by the increased desirability of utility and functionality of objects and the overall modernity of the machine. What does no change in Bilibin's art, is the artist's efforts in embracing the current mode of art all while maintaining a secondary reflex in keeping Slavic tradition intact within his works. Referring back to Fig. 8.2, suggestions of folk traditions are present on the face of the figure, with the designs painted on the face of the model resembling that of a pagan mask, or even a totem used in Slavic pagan rituals. The pagan feature is even stronger in the various masks photographed surrounding Bilibin and the production crew of *The Firebird,* presented as Fig. 8.3. The reaction against *Art Nouveau* is even clearer in this image, where the sculptural objects and masks created by Bilibin are much simpler and paired down compared to his book illustrations from earlier in his career, performing in a much more crude, "primitivistic" manner, adjacent to his nods toward the Art Deco aesthetic.

Despite the stylistic changes, Bilibin's artistic ambition remained the same. Just as he did in the 1900s in his illustrative works for "Tsarevich Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf," "Vasilisa the Beautiful," "The Tale of Tsar Saltan," and "The Tale of the Golden Cockerel," Bilibin continued to hold on to essential Russianness to preserve a manner of unique cultural nationalism in his work, and one that is up to the times and the ever-changing artistic world. The *fin de siècle* illustrative works by Ivan Yakovlevich Bilibin continue to re-emphasize the Russian

"third sphere," allied with but distinct from both East and West, modernity and tradition, a space that that can only be emulated as a fusion of the various ostensive global dichotomies.

Figure 8.2. Ivan Bilibin. Costume design for Koschei the Deathless for the ballet *The Firebird* by Igor Stravinsky. Paris, 1931.

Figure 8.3. Ivan Bilibin in the studio of Vera Popova, with artists and costumiers who contributed to the production of *The Firebird* by Igor Stravinsky. Paris, 1931.

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